

LONDON SOCIETY.

JANUARY, 1865.

OLD-FASHIONED WINTERS.



WHAT has become of them?

Why have we no snow now-a-days? Why is the Thames never frozen over? Why are the people never lost in snow-drifts? Why have skates become as obsolete or as much things of the past as stage-coaches and Hessian boots? How is it that, in these days, we import our ice from foreign countries, and sell it by the pound like tea and sugar? Grapes ripened by the sun of the south are not so very much dearer than water frozen by the icy breath of the North. The confectioner sends home our ice in a pretty pail, as if it were something dainty and precious. There are children

who can walk and talk among us here in England who never saw snow. Snow, in fact, has gone out of fashion. I can well remember when it first

began to go out of fashion. It was about twelve years ago. At that time I had some hand in 'getting up' the Christmas Number of an illustrated paper. I was tremendously proud of being so engaged, for I was but a mere lad in my teens, and by no means a brilliant youth. Nevertheless I was intrusted with the writing of an article about Christmas, and my general instructions were to introduce snow, icicles, holly-berries, mistletoe, and robin redbreasts. And I believe I did introduce them,—laid them on thick; and at least, as regards quantity, gave plenty for the money. It was a snowy number altogether. The woodcuts all represented snow scenes. I remember there was a mail coach struggling along a country road against a blinding drift, the outsides muffled up and holding their heads down to catch the snow on the tops of their hats; there was a deserted street several feet deep in snow, with nobody showing but a solitary policeman, all the rest of the community being supposed to be indoors sitting round the blazing yule log, drinking punch, kissing under the mistletoe, and wishing each other a merry Christmas and a happy new year; there was a wood scene with footsteps through the snow, and a single robin sitting on a bare branch in the foreground; there was a lively display upon the ice, where the skaters were depicted in all the familiar attitudes of leaning forward and lifting up one leg, and of poisoning themselves on the very centre of their backs with their heels in the air, signifying that they had come to grief; there were boys snowballing; and there was a country manor-house, with gleaming windows, in which a friendly party was supposed to be snowed up, and telling stories to each other; there was a picturesque boy with a shovel and a broom, ringing a bell, and saying, 'Clean your doorstep, sir?'—in fact, there was snow in all our pictures and snow in all our articles; and I at least felt satisfied that we had held the 'mirror up to nature' as it ought to be at Christmas time.

You will understand that this

number was prepared some weeks beforehand. Indeed, I believe the artist had set to work on 'The Manor-house snowed up,' early in July, when of course he had to draw largely upon his recollections and his imagination. The articles, too, were all finished by the end of November, when our inspirations were chiefly derived from fog. But no doubt it would come all right. Christmas would arrive, as he had been accustomed to do, wrapped in his mantle of snow; and all that our pens and pencils had depicted would be highly appropriate. But no; just as if to spite us and bring all our picturesque labours to nought, Christmas arrived under an umbrella, with a drop at his nose not frozen. Coaches and carriages instead of ruling parallel ruts in the soft white snow, splashed the foot-passengers with mud; no living creature stood upon one leg but the miserable fowl seeking shelter from the rain; if any one presented himself with his heels in the air, it was owing to the greasy mud on the pavement, or possibly a piece of orange peel. Instead of the prominent ware in the shop windows being bundles of skates, it was bundles of umbrellas; if the boys in the streets pelted each other it was with stones; if there were parties at country manor-houses, half the guests were laid up with catarrh.

People came and stood under umbrellas looking in through the window at our snow pictures and smiled grimly. It certainly was very provoking. Who could believe my description of 'Snowbound in a Highland Shieling at Yule,' with the streets running with rivers of mud, and the thermometer ten degrees above freezing point? They could not sympathise with it at any rate. And think of the effort I had made to realize the scene! Before I began that article I went round to the wheelwright's and procured a large chump of wood for a yule log. Being ready to begin I made up a blazing fire with the chump on the top; drew my curtains close, tried to imagine that the fog outside was snow, hung up before me a view of the Alps, and began to write with

the servant girl blowing through the keyhole to give me an idea of the howling wind. And all for nothing.

I am bound to say that the editor of the illustrated paper held on by his belief in a snowy Christmas-day most manfully; but he was disappointed so often that he was fain to give in at last. On calling us together after three or four muddy Christmases, he said, 'We must drop the snow, boys; it's no use; it only makes the old people laugh and puzzles the rising generation altogether.' I remember it was suggested by a very disgusted contributor, that the best thing to do under the circumstances would be to go in and abuse Christmas. It may have been under the influence of such disappointing and depressing circumstances that the late Robert Brough composed his famous Christmas Carol, of which I remember this verse:—

'Oh, rest you, merry gentlemen,
Let nothing you dismay,
But be prepared to meet the Ills
That come on Christmas-day.
And, mind, a respirator buy,
A good thick shawl also,
For in this jolly Christmas time
The asthma's all the go.

And 'tis tidings of comfort and joy.'

Certainly a very great change has been coming over the seasons of late. What does Admiral Fitzroy say to it? Has M. Mathieu (de la Drôme) any theory on the subject? Can Murphy's weather eye discern the cause? Is Zadkiel Tao Ze able to account for it in any way? Is the earth changing its axis, and turning us into the torrid zone? Shall future generations of Britons hunt elephants and gorillas in Epping Forest? These last questions assume almost a serious shape when we go back over the record of past winters, and note how frost and snow are deserting our northern parallel. In the year 1035 there was a frost in England on Midsummer-day so intense that the corn and fruit were destroyed. In 1063 the Thames was frozen over for fourteen weeks. In 1234, there was a severe frost all over Europe for many weeks. The

Mediterranean was frozen over, and merchants crossed in carts with their merchandize. In 1434 the Thames was frozen over from below bridge to Gravesend. From this time frosts in this country have gradually decreased in severity and duration. In the last and present centuries, the great frosts were as follows:—In 1716 the frost was so intense that a fair was held on the Thames. In 1732 there was a great fall of snow in the north of England; flocks of sheep and lambs were lost, and the rivers were frozen up for many weeks. In 1762 there was a snow storm in England which lasted for eleven days. In January 1776, occurred the greatest fall of snow ever known in this country. From November to January 1789, the Thames could be crossed at the Custom House, the Tower, Execution Dock, Putney, and Brentford. In 1808 there was a very severe snow storm, and many persons lost their lives; some were frozen to death; others were killed by carriages upsetting. Upon the north road the snow drifted in many parts to a depth of from forty to fifty feet. In the vicinity of Biggleswade, the mail coaches were completely buried, and it was only by the greatest exertions that the passengers could be rescued. At Bury there was a county ball, on Thursday, the 11th of February, and in the morning the snow was so deep that the company were detained there until the following Sunday. This was something like a snowing up; but instead of telling stories, the company made themselves comfortable by having a public ordinary each day, and a ball in the evening, at the Angel Inn. A similar occurrence took place at Stamford, Thursday being the night of the ball and the assembly. All the families of the neighbourhood who attended were snow bound, and were obliged to take up their abode for some days at the inns.

On the nights of January 10th and 11th, 1814, there was a heavy fall of snow in the west of England. It lay twelve feet deep in the middle of the road, on Hall-Down, four miles beyond Exeter. The mail coaches were greatly delayed. The

drifted snow between Bridport and Dorchester presented such a formidable barrier, that notwithstanding every effort, no passage could be gained through it after four hours' digging by a gang of labourers with spades and shovels. The mail coach was obliged to return to Bridport. Again in 1816, the roads were blocked up and the mail coaches stopped.

'But Lor' bless you, sir, there is no real winter weather now-a-days.' This is not my own deliverance, but

that of an old gentleman who has seen ninety-five winters, and who, on a certain December day in the last century, saw Dr. Samuel Johnson walking through the snow down Fleet Street. I don't know that it can be satisfactorily established as a fact that the winters are becoming permanently less and less severe in this latitude; but there is certainly a very wide-spread impression in that direction. Perhaps in the vast expanse of time it is a mere temporary change, attributable to a whim



of the winds. Hoops went out; but they have come in again. Frost and snow have gone out; but they may be fashionable once more.

However, my impression is precisely that of my nonagenarian friend—that there is no winter weather now-a-days. When I was a lad—about the third of ninety years ago—there were snow storms worthy of the name.

There was a proverb, which

proved that a rainy Christmas was a much-dreaded exception to the natural rule of weather. 'A green Yule will make a fat kirkyard.' There have been a great many green Yules lately. I don't remember more than one in all my school time. About the middle of November we always looked for snow, and rarely looked in vain. I remember that, about this time, I had always a double row of nails driven into

the soles of my boots to be ready for the slides. The rainy, muddy, foggy, sloppy winters now in vogue, are looked forward to only with dread. People who have the means fly away south, to avoid them, like the swallows. But in the good old times the first flakes of snow were hailed with demonstrations of delight, with shouts of glee and clapping of hands. Snow made winter not only picturesque, but comfortable. We all like to read of snow storms; we

all like to look upon snow pictures for, somewhat paradoxically, they are suggestive of warmth, and jollity, and cosiness. The very perils of a snow storm are enjoyable. I have a lively recollection of being in the position of that gentleman on horseback, whom our artist has depicted. The distance I had to travel was little more than five miles; but it was with the greatest difficulty I managed to reach the end of my journey. The road was open and



exposed, and the thick, blinding, choking drift blew in my face the whole of the way. Every now and then I had to turn the horse round to gain, both for the animal and myself, a little breathing time. But there was almost as much danger in standing still with my back to the drift as in going on. After a minute or two of pause, I found myself going to sleep in the saddle, and the pony

retracing his steps, though he knew he was going away from home. It was an exciting ride at first; but when I had accomplished half of my journey, and found myself gasping for breath, and my limbs becoming numbed and powerless, I began to be seriously alarmed. When I got home at last, I had to be lifted from the pony's back and carried into the house. The pain caused by the re-

turning circulation of the blood was dreadful. I don't think I ever suffered any pain so acute. If the journey had been a mile longer, both horse and rider must have been smothered.

What schoolboy has not enjoyed the fun (like that, we have sketched on the previous page) of making a snow man, beginning with a mere handful of compressed snow, and rolling it along until, having licked up all the snow in its path, it becomes a gigantic ball, a huge block, of soft marble, ready to be hewn by the chisel (spade) of the juvenile artist into the form of a colossal head, the eyes, nose, and mouth being indicated by daubs of black earth!

But few of the rising generation, I suspect, have ever experienced the rare delight of digging their way out of a snowed-up house. In that country parsonage where I was born and bred, the necessity for this species of excavation occurred almost every winter—in those old days when winter was winter. I have known all the doors and windows on the ground floor to be completely blocked up with snow. When a heavy drift was expected we took the precaution to carry spades into the house the night before; but when we were taken unprepared, we set to work with the fire-shovels. On one notable occasion these instruments were unequal to the work, and the farm labourers came and dug away from the outside. Great was the shout of triumph when the fire-shovels and the spades met, and we could see daylight through the tunnel in the great wall of snow. That year, old Lizzie, who lived in a one-story turf cottage by the side of the turnpike road, was snowed up

to the very chimney. We had to dig Lizzie out like a baked body from the ashes of Pompeii. On one occasion, old Peter Smith drove his coach over the rigging of Lizzie's house, and never knew that he was off the road until one of the horses put his foot in the chimney and brought the whole team down.

The community thereabouts had a joint-stock proprietary in a huge machine called a snow-plough; a wooden frame in the shape of the letter V, by which, with the aid of many men and horses, the snow was cleared from the roads. But sometimes the plough and all our horses and men were unequal to the Herculean task, and we had just to stay in-doors, often for weeks, until the thaw came.

Not long ago, I heard that erratic Professor, John Stuart Blackie, lecture on Lysurgus, at the Royal Institution. When he had finished his lecture he said to his audience, 'I don't know what your opinion may be on the subject; but my own is, that I have done the thing very cleverly.' So I, taking a hint, flatter myself, that, in the absence of frost and snow, and in the decline of winter, I have, in regarding winter as something old-fashioned and out of date, hit upon a very good excuse for treating of the subject at all.*

A. H.

* Suppose this number of 'London Society' should happen to be read in snowed-up houses: robin redbreasts tapping at the windows for crumbs; boys clearing the snow for a slide; water frozen in the pipes and so forth! In that case, all I can say is, that the way the clerk of the weather keeps dodging the poor author, trying his best to do some seasonable work and earn a crust, is really shameful.



FIRESIDE FROLICS.

UNBENDING THE BOW.



THE ILL-BRED VISITOR.—Page 11.

WE have all heard of the very scientific gentleman who purposely married a quite unscientific lady, in order to repose his intellect during their confidential domestic colloquies. On exactly the same principle, whilst studying the wonders of a foreign capital, say Paris,—after having laboured the whole day long in picture, print, and statue galleries, in Luxembourg and Louvre; after we have been employed for six or eight hours in packing our brain-boxes so full of information that there is no room to squeeze in a single item more—where do we go to, when welcome dinner has put body and mind into a state of luxurious lassitude?

Do we ask where we can hear the discourse of an evening professor who will treat us to a liberal allowance of middle-age casuistry? Do we look out

for a lecture on the differential calculus. Do we even go, by choice, to the Théâtre Français, to hear a five-act tragedy by the Grand Corneille, however finely it be declaimed? No, no, no! our minds have slaved in harness long enough, and now we want to turn them out to grass, to roll and cut capers on the free green sward, or perhaps to enjoy a doze in a sunny corner. We turn our backs on High Art, High Science, High Everything, and betake ourselves to the Théâtre Lyrique, where Mozart's, Adam's, or Auber's strains are warbled; to the Théâtre du Châtelet, where a fairy-tale, mainly made up of tricks and dances, beguiles us throughout three long acts. Pierrot's absurdities coax us into sufferance of that ill-ventilated den, the Funambules; or perhaps we take a

cab to the Cirque de l'Impératrice, for the pleasure of regarding young ladies and gentlemen dancing on the tight-rope, swinging on the slack-wire, doing Joan of Arc on horseback, or the Brazilian ape on foot, with interludes by English and Irish clowns, who dare what they like with the Parisian public.

And just so, by parity of reason, does it happen that, at (and for a month or so after) the period of 'computed time when the old year splices his worn-out rope's-end with the fresh bit held out by the new, we have had enough of our learned profession, whether law, physic, or divinity; the 'Ologies have become temporarily covered with a repulsive crust of staleness; it wearies us of having our mental noses constantly held to the grindstone of business; and we hail with joy, open or concealed, the inauguration of a Juvenile Saturnalia. The little lords and ladies of misrule are excused in our eyes by the feeling that we too may have had, of late too much class-confinement and schoolroom discipline; and we are not at all sorry when the postman brings an invitation to a merry party, professedly got up for the amuse-

ment of 'the young people,' though the elderlies profit by the occasion. In short, our well-drilled souls welcome the word of command to stand at ease.

The season of itself offers various special opportunities by which we do not profit so much as we might. The reconciling of grudges and the wiping off scores of misunderstandings on New Year's Day, by a shake of the hand, a kiss, or a call, is a laudable Continental custom;—though we may hesitate before submitting to the costly tyranny of *etrennes*, or New Year's Gifts, to all our acquaintance. Christmas-boxing has become a nuisance and an odious impost, because of the grasping way in which and the greedy persons by whom it is exacted; but it becomes, as we know, a cheerful pleasure, when Emile de Girardin's principle of taxation, namely, Voluntary Assessment, presides over these social institutions. It is more blessed to give than to receive. The giver often feels a more vivid thrill of delight than the recipient.

During winter evenings, Tales of my Grandmother may be quoted, without rebuke; and therefore I will mention that my own more-or-less-honoured



grandmother,—some of us had a grudge against her, because she presented us with a crusty old grandfather-in-law, who had a shocking bad cough and bunioned feet—my grandmother amused herself and others by insisting on the personal homage of all her grandchildren on Boxing-day. All, all, all, little and big, from the new-born babe to the pretty young lady who had left a finishing-school (where she had not enough to eat), were bound to present

themselves, under awful penalties—which still remain shrouded in mystery, because no single grandchild, out of all that numerous group, ever had the hardihood to expose him or herself to their infliction. My grandmother has some right to give herself airs in her grave, seeing that she has furnished, in the shape of us, her grandchildren, permanent settlers and inhabitants to England, Scotland, continental Europe, Australia, and New Zealand; while

North and South America are anxiously awaiting the arrival of other members of the clan. Probably the old lady did not suspect the wide-spread destinies of her posterity, when she annually summoned us round her, to state our ages, to tell our names, christian and sur, and to receive her graduated bounty, measured by the ascending scale of a penny a year. Fractions counted for nothing. The six-months old infant went away half-penniless. For cash (supposing one penny to be cash), it was told to wait another year, and was sent home with merely a kiss and an orange to suck or a biscuit to munch, but with no specie grasped in its tiny fist.

'How old are you, my little dear?' she would say. 'And what's your name?'

'Why, gran'ma,' the laughing child would answer, 'you know I'm Sam. You called me "Sam" yesterday afternoon. And ma' says I was six-and-a-half last Wednesday week. And I had plum-pudding for dinner besides roast goose.'

'Six-and-a-half! That's all nonsense. We don't do things by halves, here. You're six, my dear; and there's a bright new sixpence for you. Be a good boy; though you take more after your mother's family than after us. You're a regular Coleman, certainly, with your curly hair, your dark-brown eyes, and the button wart by the side of your nose. Be a good boy, and you may choose which you like—the gingerbread gold watch or Taffy on the goose.'

Of course, little Sam seized the Taffy with his right hand, and was stretching with his left after the glowing yellow watch, when the stern glance of Administrative Justice made him retire with a modest 'Thank you, gran'ma.' And then sailed in good cousin Ann, slim in figure and stately in step, whose delicate features were only the more interesting from a slight dash of small-pox misprints, the result of gran'ma's prejudice in favour of inoculation, [she performed the operation herself, without asking the parents' leave]. We, the little ones, wondered how any grandchild could ever contrive to grow so old as cousin Ann; and we thought she received a handsome dowry, when gran'ma delivered to her, eighteen-pence! Would she condescend to look at a cake-watch or a mounted Taffy of gingerbread? I should think not, indeed!—Such was one of my grandmother's contrivances for unbending her bow annually.

'Breaking up, and going away! O, the happy holiday!' is a school-ery and

a pupil-shout which has relieved adult and elderly hearts, as well as young ones. People can pull out their buckram and unlace their state habiliments while the little folk are crowding around them. Society is then permitted to take its ease, and to lay aside its very dignified demeanour. He—he he even a Common Councilman—may cease to be formal; and she—she she even the Lady Patroness of a fancy-ball for clothing the under-dressed Hottentots—may cease to be proud—without calling in the aid of Lady Wortley Montagu's famous champagne and chicken. Conversations give place to meetings for the propagation of conundrums; learned soirées are swept away by the invasion of private theatricals, Christmas-tree reward-distributions, and twelfth-cake lotteries. O, the happy holiday! Intellectual conversation and spiritual remarks are not expected from every human being during the benevolent interregnum of the genius hight Christmas Vacation.

The best way is to take advantage at once of the license of the season, according to the measure of your gifts, and to plunge boldly into nonsense, well or ill, just as you would take your first dip in the sea. Pray, then, why is my smart new overcoat—the one you evidently admired this morning—like the muddy ditch at the bottom of our meadow?—Why? Because it is all covered with frogs. What animal is that which has four legs while living and only two when dead?—You don't know? Dear me, how dull you are! Why, a sheep, which, in the butcher's shop, consists of two legs merely and two shoulders. What creature has four hands, under similar circumstances? A monkey? No; we don't eat monkeys here. But every veal has, if not four hands, at least four knuckles. Can you say, 'Beef without mustard,' which some persons find very difficult to pronounce?—Certainly: 'Beef without mustard.'—Pshaw! 'Tisn't that. Say simply 'Beef.'—In a brood of chicken, how do you know the little cocks from the little hens as soon as they are hatched?—You can't tell? Watch as they skip out of the shell one by one! It's a cock, if he skips to the right; it's a hen, if she skips to the left. You don't quite comprehend? Well, I declare!

But how delightful to pass through the half-open folding-doors into the small inner drawing-room, which is well furnished with toys! some of them new, and others so old and obsolete as to have all the charm of a resurrection. With the lamp we can

see exceedingly well the symmetrical changes of the kaleidoscope. What a run it had in its early days! It swarmed everywhere, like the frogs in Egypt. And now! I have caught really an elegant pattern, like a rose-window in a Gothic cathedral. Peep. Ah! you jogged my arm; the figure has shaken itself into something else.

It was a good thought to place a toilette-table looking-glass in the room, to observe the vagaries of the phenakistiscope. Our eyes are made the fools of a whirligig, and are certainly not worth all the other senses, in respect to matters of fact. That 'seeing is believing,' may well be doubted. Spin the circular card with its set of objects painted on it. Peep at it in the mirror, looking over its rim. You have a paviour pounding away at the street; on another card, a dog jumps to snatch a piece of bread from his master's hand; on another, firemen hand each other buckets of water. A man jumps over a walking-stick; a

carpenter vigorously planes a plank of wood; top and bottom sawyers work with alternate strokes; a cook swings her salad-basket backwards and forwards, to drain its contents; people in a crowd run to and fro different ways; all in decided motion by an optical illusion, though when the spinning is stopped they are as stationary as a picture on its canvas. Is it a deception which the stereoscope practises, putting solid for superficial, changing plane surfaces for deep perspectives, and excavating hollows where everything was flat? or is it only a corollary to Bishop Berkeley's theory that all is ideal, and that such a substance as matter does not exist? But I forget that we profess to be unbending our bows. Far better than cudgelling our brains with such abstractions is the putting together of this dissected map of Europe as it is before the further changes. We have thus far rightly combined our sea and land; but it will never do to make France include Switzerland as well as



Savoy, nor to put the Black Sea into the middle of Russia. Welcome also to our old friend, the Chinese Puzzle, who is too easy and varied ever to become tiresome. I have brought a sort of Chinese puzzle in my portemonnaie. Take these twenty little paper triangles, and lay them together so as to form a perfect square.

The drawing-room door slowly opens, and in stalks superb John Thomas, the footman. He is not the king of hearts, but the jack of calves. How important he looks! The oracle speaks.

'Please, mem, here's a foreign gen-

tleman as asks permission to look at the pictures.'

'How very strange!' says the astonished hostess, who is not in the secret. 'To come at such a time! In the evening, too! Tell him, John Thomas, that it's quite impossible now.'

'So I did, mem,' responds Johnny, delighted with his part; 'but he won't take no refusal, mem.'

'Let him come in, my dear,' says the master of the house, who is in the plot. 'He may be commissioned to purchase hidden treasures of art for the Emperor of Russia. Or, he may be a learned

connoisseur, and if we refuse, he may write to the "Times," or put us into his book of travels. John Thomas, ask the stranger in.'

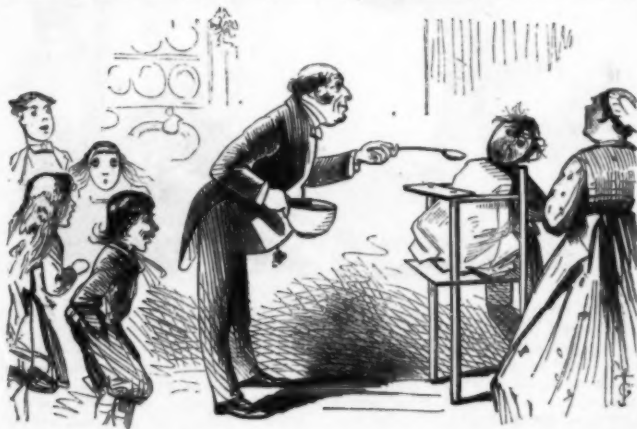
The door opens again, and the visitor enters. He is a very short, thick-set man, with a long cloak reaching down to his heels. With extreme ill-breeding, he keeps his hat on, and turns his back on the company present, commencing at once his examination of the pictures nearest to the door. Short as he is, he makes himself still shorter to observe those that are hung near the floor; and then, when he comes to a full-length portrait, he suddenly elevates his stature to seven or eight feet high, meeting the individual delineated face to face. And then he assumes all the intermediate stages of tallness requisite for the close inspection of the pictures before which he passes. He must either belong to the invertebrate family of men, or have a backbone as extensible as an earthworm. He has

soon seen enough, and walks out of the room without once making his bow or showing his face. 'Don't cry and be frightened, my darling Jane. It isn't a monster, nor a fee-fo-fum giant who eats little babies. It is only a clever way of making use of a broom-handle, and I shouldn't wonder if your cousin Tom had something to do with it.'

Enter John Thomas again, with the corners of his mouth hypocritically pulled down.

'Please, mem, cook's very sorry, but her nephey, who you let her ask to spend the evening, is a very naughty boy; he won't eat his custard, but cries for currant-jam. Cook says she can't do nothing with him, and she hopes master will come down and exercise his authority.' Happy John, to be safely delivered of your speech!

'The lubberly lout is naughty, is he? I'll soon settle him!' exclaims the head of the house, simulating indignation at such misbehaviour. 'I have a



secret for the cure of troublesome boys. Come and see.'

Myne host forthwith betakes himself to the kitchen, followed by an inquisitive throng of youngsters. In one corner, on a high child's chair, sits the refractory offender, with his face all smeared with custard and jam. His head is very large in proportion to his body, and he rolls his eyes and makes extraordinary grimaces. Beside him stands his aunt, the cook, feeding him out of a bowl with a long-handled spoon, and scolding severely.

'Won't he eat his supper?' asks the angry governor. 'Give me the custard.

There now, young fellow, if you don't swallow this spoonful quietly, I'll knock your ugly head off; I will indeed.'

You can't make a silken purse out of a sow's ear. The ill-bred cub sputters and spits the custard that is offered him. The governor, losing patience, gives him a slap on the face with the spoon, when—horrible to relate!—the head drops off, falling backwards, and nothing but the headless body remains sitting on the chair.

'Oh, Jane, dear; don't take on so! They haven't killed him, or it. Let us go and look. The little boy, supposed to be cook's nephew, is only an effigy

of stuffed clothes; and the head that fell off belongs, I think, to that wicked rogue cousin Tom again; for there he stands laughing in the corner, wiping his face with the kitchen towel. But Professor Hoohkus Poohkustoniuss is come. We must return to the drawing-room to witness his tricks, and see whether Tom can find any of them out.

Legerdemain is far from a despicable art, especially when it can be made to serve political uses, as was practised lately by the French. The great Robert Houdin, the celebrated *prestidigitateur*, was sent on a mission to Algeria, where he caused enormous astonishment amongst the natives. Muscular

Arabs were thunderstruck to find they could not move, by exerting all their strength, a little box which the wizard lifted with his little finger. The casket assumed a still more diabolical character, when it was found that the master magician could allow them to remove it, or not, at his pleasure, by simply breathing gently upon it. In vain they handed the box from one to the other, inspecting it at top, sides, and bottom; it remained inscrutable, and was the box of Satan. And as to the coffee from the inexhaustible pot—do you think they would taste anything that welled up from an infernal source, however captivating might be its odour?



Oh, no; no fear of that, though their pride would prevent them from manifesting surprise. Robert Houdin proved a powerful missionary, and produced an excellent effect on the indigenous population. The grand trick which astonished and alarmed them most, was the juggling away and causing to disappear a full-grown man. His Mussulman spectators were placed in this dilemma,—if they looked no deeper than the surface, they must believe their European conquerors gifted with supernatural powers superior to those pretended to by their own dervishes and marabouts:—if they caught a peep behind the scenes, they must admit their superior intelligence and knowledge.

Another French conjuror, scouring the provinces, turned his art to his own more immediate advantage. Walking through the market-place at Cherbourg, where he was to give a performance in

the evening, he asked an old woman the price of her eggs. She told him she sold them twelve sous the dozen. He said that was much too cheap, and that she did not know the value of the eggs in her basket. He then took one, broke it before her eyes, and showed her that it contained, besides the yolk and the white, a forty-franc piece—a large gold coin, sometimes called a double Napoleon. He broke more eggs; every one contained, or seemed to contain, a piece of gold. Finally, he offered to buy all her eggs at twenty sous the dozen instead of twelve. She replied that she was not so foolish as to part with precious eggs like those, and that she should keep them herself. So he went away, pretending great disappointment at her refusal.

As soon as his back was turned, the silly old woman began breaking her eggs, one by one, greatly astonished that she could not find one with a

forty-franc piece in it. And so she went on, till not an egg was left. She was sitting disconsolate and eggless in a mess of shells and spoilt custard-meat. She then began to cry and take on. The other market-women crowded around her; but they only laughed at her when she told them of the price offered for her eggs and why she had refused it. The conjuror, however, soon returned, and after having his laugh too, he paid her market-price for the eggs she had broken. The trick served him as a capital advertisement. He had a crowded house, lots of applause, and pockets full of money.

Professor Hoochkus Poohkustoniuss, like the rest of his class, has the gift of the gab, and prefaces his performances with plenty of boasting.

'Years ago,' he tells us, 'I was sent for to give a representation before a high personage who then resided in the palace of the Tuileries, and I wanted to conclude the spectacle with something entirely new and unexpected. I actually ventured, ladies and gentlemen, to beg for one of the swans which ornament the garden of the Tuileries. Royal good-nature granted my suit, and the beautiful bird was brought to me. I put him into a large basket, where he sat as if he were reposing on his nest. The basket was then covered with a drapery, and I requested his Majesty, Louis Philippe—bush! the most elevated person present—to say into what place, great or small, near or distant, he ordained the swan to be transported.'

'Make him return into his egg!' was the answer, given amidst a burst of laughter.

'You see, ladies and gentlemen, that

I was considered worthy to be treated without much consideration, and not to be spared. Bowing to the great man, in sign of my acceptance of his order, I lifted the cloth which covered the basket. The swan was gone, and in its place the basket was filled with smelling-bottles, bouquets, fans, and all sorts of trinkets that had been stolen, without their knowing it, from the ladies who had laughed at me. They crowded round me, in great surprise, less to claim their own than to get a peep at my enchanted basket.

"And the swan?" they exclaimed; "What has become of it?"

'I could only answer that he had returned into his shell, where he must remain the proper time of incubation; but a hint being given me to hasten the time of hatching, the swan was soon restored to his mate.'

'Clever enough,' observed cousin Tom, 'but not cleverer than the showman who smokes five cigars at once. But I know a better joke than that of the swan. Look here, cousin Jane. You see this macaroon, and you see these three hats which I place in a row on the table. I eat the macaroon. You see it's all gone down Red Lion Lane. Now under which of these three hats shall I put the macaroon which I have just eaten?'

Jane smiles incredulously, and says, 'Under this ugly old hat with the narrow brim.'

Cousin Tom puts the narrow-brimmed hat on his head, and triumphantly exclaims, 'There!'

With which we leave the light-fingered Professor to continue his task of unbending bows.



SCENES IN COURT.



CHAPTER I.

I HAVE always had an affection for Westminster Hall. My earliest recollections are bound up with it, and I cannot bring my memory to tell me of a time when it was not to me an object of reverence and love.

I think of it as of an old friend, and love it so much that I glory in the knowledge that it is almost certain to survive me. The carved angels who adorn the supports to the roof are all my intimates. They have been my *participes curarum* 'even from boyish days.' They knew when I was in trouble with my 'construe,' entangled in Greek roots, or posed in Euclid. They smiled on me when my spirit failed me because of bul-
lies. They were my confidants when I, aged 13, was so deeply enamoured of the pretty daughter, aged 25, of the porter of our school. I used to discuss to them, with a confidence unbounded, the propriety of declar-

ing my affection, and the probabilities of my lady's acceptance of me. They never told me the plain rude things I have been told and have myself told since. My weekly shilling, with its 3d. mortgage for eaten tarts, was not pointed at as insufficient for the maintenance of us both. They knew—and why therefore tell them?—that Bessie — had nothing to bring, save a good appetite, towards our mutual support. I told them I should work all day for her: I should write books, invent engines, paint pictures, make great discoveries in chemistry, and fifty other things which were quite easy to be done. There would be no doubt about a living. They never sneered nor said unkind things, but always smiled and beamed with kindness as I poured forth to them the whole secrets of my heart. This begat a close friendship which has not waned by increasing. I still

hold them as fast friends. When I became old enough to understand what they said, they told me long stories of the things they had seen in their time. They interested me with accounts of trials at which they had been witnesses, and filled me with admiration by their descriptions of my historical favourites.

They bore testimony to the correctness of Vandyke's portrait of the unfortunate Earl of Strafford, and brought the favour of the man so vividly to my mind, that I fancied I could see the clear-cut face and dark complexion of him, and hear his ringing, bell-like voice appealing to the peers for mercy on his fault, on account of the innocent 'pledges' which a saint, now in heaven, had left him.

They seemed not to have known of the earl's execution; for they said, the trial broke down, and they concluded the prisoner was acquitted. When I told them of the Bill of Attainder, and of the king's consent to his friend's death, they wept whole heaps of dust and cobweb, and gave solemn ratification to Strafford's endorsement of the Palmist's warning about putting one's trust in princes.

This did not prevent them from speaking sorrowfully about the trial of the king, and of his octogenarian archbishop.

They had seen the man who is portrayed in undying colours, in the noble picture now in Middle Temple Hall, enter the place as a prisoner; and they had listened throughout the trial with mingled awe and indignation, almost laughing outright, however, when they heard Lady Fairfax say aloud, in answer to the call for her husband, that he knew better than to be present, since his wife was. They heard the whole thing, including the sentence; and somehow or other they were already acquainted with the fact of the execution.

Then they had stories to tell of the Seven Bishops, and Warren Hastings; they had overheard Burke's *bon mot* about 'the (vo)luminous pages of Gibbon.' They had seen and heard much more than I can remember or write down; and they pleased me immensely by the

ready confidence they gave me. We passed many happy hours together, and then came an interval of separation, during which I listened to the stories of other roof-supporting cherubim, and gathered scraps of information from many an ancient place. Time, however, brought me back again to my old friends, if it did not to my first love. The latter made an excellent wife to the baker who was patronized by the school; but the former remained as before, unchanged—unless, perhaps, a trifle dirtier. They had often inquired of me what went on inside those doors which faced one half of them on the floor beneath; and when I came back again after the separation before named, it became my business to instruct myself so that I might answer their questions.

On the right of the Great Hall, as you enter it, is a flight of stone steps, on the top of which a vestibule—guarded by a she Cerberus, who has acquired a prescriptive right to war upon the digestion of her Majesty's lieges, by means of strangely-compounded edibles which she sells to them—leads to the two courts where the judges of the Queen's Bench dispense justice. More of both of these presently. Running between the two, or rather at the back of one and by the side of the other, is a darksome passage, dimly lighted, conducting, as a stranger might legitimately think, to the dungeons and torture chambers whither are consigned the delinquents condemned by the Court to purge their offences, but leading, in fact, to chambers destined to far other uses. The genial light of day is excluded from this passage, and the insufficient lamps which are supposed to illumine it, serve but to cast a grim shade upon the assembled clerks and clients who haunt the hard seats along its sides as though they found in them a nature akin to their own. Out of it a side door opens into the great Court of Queen's Bench; and through the door come and go counsellors and senators, gowns, silk and stuff—the *élite* of the law, with the rank and file thereof. There is not any inscription over the door, as there is

over the door in another place, bidding those who enter leave hope behind them;—yet there is something in the ordinary, unprofessional creature's breast which makes him read in the faces of those he finds in this grim abode, a certain indication that hope has small place there. But the passage, whither does it lead? To subterranean regions certainly—perhaps to the very cellar in which Guido Fawkes laid the train which was to have carried King James and his Parliament express, to heaven or to hell. But a visit to the first chamber at the end of the stone staircase, on which wiggid and robed men ascend and descend, as unlike as possible to the angels whom the Patriarch Jacob saw from his stony pillow, reveals no more formidable a person than Mr. —, the robing-master, and no more suspicious-looking a being than the ancient man who is his servitor. The room, however, in which they live, and move, and get their fees, is more open to cavil than are its tenants. I incline to the opinion that it is Guy's original cellar; and so firmly, that I decline to listen to any statement which shall try to convince me to the contrary, by showing that it is many yards away from where the old Parliament House stood. Small, gloomy, with no daylight, really underground, and damp and misty as cellars are wont—the eyes require time to get accustomed to the gloom which the garish gaslights create but are powerless to dispel. Rows of hooks round a stout framework on one side of the room suggest the neighbourhood of Sachenteges, racks, bilboes, and other 'hateful and grim things' to which they must be appurtenant; the framework itself, with many mysterious joints and holes in it, looks in the semi-darkness not unlike some foul instrument of torture; and at first it is difficult to divest one's self of the notion that he has got into a veritable chamber of horrors, of which the prepossessing-looking Mr. — is perhaps the attendant surgeon, and of which his curiously-featured assistant is the sworn tormentor. Instinctively one looks about for the barrels of gun-

powder, the coals which conceal them, and a figure like that the boys drag about on the 5th of November; and I am far from being convinced they are not actually there, though I have not been able to discover them. That small mirror in the wall, surely it must be used for ascertaining whether breath is left in a tortured victim: the wavy character of its surface precludes the idea of its being employed as a means to personal adornment, and the former use would be in keeping with the character of the room. Those ominous-looking boxes of wood and tin, in shape not unlike the human head, and labelled with names—what is their office? Is this the hangman's morgue, and is he allowed to keep the heads of decapitated felons to scare the living from crime, or to allow of phrenologists studying their science on the original busts? Or is this a sort of parliamentary terror akin to that which Domitian contrived for the Roman senators when he showed them into a dimly-lighted funeral chamber, wherein they found their coffins, 'ready for immediate use,'—as the advertisements have it—and inscribed with their own names? Are wordy and hated members brought into this hall of English Vehmgericht and frightened into agreements to vote differently, and to shorten their speeches, by the sight of their own head cases, labelled with their names—and of Greenacreish sort of bags yawning to receive their skullless trunks? I scrutinize the names on the cases, sniffing the while—for I am not without a presentiment that the Calcraft museum theory is the right one,—and I look curiously for the names of certain hon. members who would be sure to be represented if the second supposition were correct. My eyes do not deceive me when I actually read the names of some of these. I saw them alive and well but a few days since;—have all their glories shrunk to this little space, so soon? 'Alas! poor —!' I exclaim, and turn away from the cases, convinced that the British public cannot be aware of the secrets of these secret places, and resolved

that I will lose no time in making it acquainted with the discoveries I have made. Even judges under Charles I. refused to say that Felton might lawfully be tortured; and shall my Lord Westbury be suffered to tweak the noses of his opponents with red-hot pincers, like another Dunstan, and to consign their 'proud tops' to these infernal preserved meat canisters? No. The 'Advertiser,' the 'Star,' and an 'Independent Press,' shall hear of it; and the decree of the second Lateran Council of Pompeii shall assuredly be quoted against it.

I find I have been wrong. Though the question as to the powder and coal and Guy Fawkes remain an open one, there is, I fear, no ground for the anxiety which I had intended to exhibit through the medium of the press. Further inquiries have satisfied me that Mr. — is not the surgeon I had imagined him; though it required the exhibition on his part of his power as a 'leech,' to bleed me to the extent of 17. 5s. before I could be convinced. His assistant—a silent and sad man—evidently affected by long acquaintance with the place—is no sworn tormentor. Mr. — is 'master of the robes,' committed to his care; and the silent man helps him to put them on the backs of counsellors who patronize him. The tin canisters, in shape not unlike the human head, are wig-boxes, labelled with the names of those who own them; the butcher-like hooks, of which mention was made, support the gowns which are fellows with the wigs; and the Greenacreish bags are the vehicles in which the gowns travel when going from one Court to another. The mirror is really meant to help in adorning the person, and the framework alluded to is intended to hold the property of those who frequent the room. In point of fact this is no other than a robing-room. The plain deal table is not used for dissecting purposes, but as a place for hats. This knowledge came only with the lapse of time. The first occasion on which I entered the room, I almost held my breath till I had got out of it again, and felt, as I ascended the stone

steps to the Court above, something of the feeling which Dante had, when he left the last circle of the Inferno, and came where he could see the stars again.

On this same first occasion I distinctly remember how shame and confusion were made to cover my face in this passage, of which I spoke just now, though the 'glooming,' or 'gloaming' which prevailed within it hid the fact from the sight of all beholders. I had noticed two men whispering together, looking towards me the while, as if they were speaking of me, and a cold shudder ran through me as the thought flashed across my mind that they might be there in the interests of Messrs. C—— and D——, whose forbearance in respect of sundry 'small claims' had been taxed somewhat fully; and the horrible idea occurred to me, that these men had been sent to beard me in the very precincts of the Court, in the hope of driving me to that which was next to impossible—a settlement. I was questioning to myself how far the privilege of counsel attending the Courts of Justice would cover me, and was doubting anxiously whether that privilege was enjoyed only by those who actually had business to transact, or whether it extended over the whole class generally. I was doubting how far it would be wise to allow of this plea, which savoured of adding insult to injury, being debated, and then roused myself at the thought, what an occasion this would be for showing the world the astonishing powers of speech and reasoning which I took it for granted reposed within me, and almost hoped myself right in the surmise which conscience, rather than judgment, had thrown out as to the character of the men, when one of them advanced towards me, holding a brief in his hand, and inquired in a tone which relieved me greatly, notwithstanding my recent wishes for a contest, whether I were not Mr. Jones.

I readily acknowledged that ancient name to be mine, and then bubbled up in my mind the thought that my good genius had been playing me a good turn, and had

sent this man to give me my first Court brief. How kind of D—, my attorney friend, who had promised me so often, while yet I was but a student, how great things he would do for me. There could be no doubt I had done D— much wrong when I had mistrusted the lavish promises he showered upon me. Yes; my name was Jones!

'Consultation at nine to-morrow morning, sir, in the robing-room. Mr. D— will feel much obliged if you will attend particularly to this case, as Mr. — (the leader and Q.C.) will be very much engaged, and may not read his brief.'

Mr. D—! I did not know him. Had never heard his name before. My friend's London agent, no doubt.

'Very well,' I answered, looking at the brief, whereon were inscribed those cabalistic signs which so much gladden the hearts of all counsel, whether leader or junior, and which informed all whom it might concern that Mr. Jones was concerned for the plaintiff, in an action against the Great Western Railway, and that Mr. Jones was to have ten guineas for his advocacy therein.

Holding the brief in my hand as though it were a marshal's bâton, I entered the Court of Queen's Bench with the idea of making an impression upon my brethren who should see me enter there, though for the first time, with a brief in my hand. Upon L— and B— especially I desired to let fall the full weight of my importance, because they had so many times hinted at the absurdity of my ever expecting to hold a brief, unless, as they were pleased to add, it might be one in my own behalf as defendant in an action upon sundry accounts delivered. I walked in and sideway'd to a place in the middle of the second row, where I saw L— sitting behind his morning paper, his wig pushed back and disclosing a quantity of his brown curly hair, his gown just clinging to his shoulders, and a look of nothing particular to do showing itself upon his face.

'Hullo! Jones, got a brief? Your own, old chap? Deuced glad

of it; special jury, of course. Want reporting?' for D— is reporter-in-chief of cases tried before her Majesty's judges at Westminster and Guildhall, to the 'Law Reformer's Gazette.'

'Good firm, that!' said L—, looking at the name of my clients. 'How did you get taken in tow? I thought your namesake on the Southern Circuit did their junior work. Want new blood, I suppose; but like to keep the old name.'

A cold shudder passed through me as L— uttered these words, for they conveyed to my mind the idea of there having possibly been a mistake. I strove to cast it off, but could not; the suspicion was enough to unsteady my eyesight as I endeavoured to run cursorily through the brief. The interesting nature of the action, and the many points for argument which it opened up, gradually absorbed me so much, that I did not notice the entrance of the attorney's clerk who had given me the brief, and who was now signalling to me by many signs and gestures.

'There's another brief for you, Jones,' said L—, nudging me so as to draw my attention to the man, who, unable to reach me, evidently desired to have speech with me, and who seemed to be in a very excited state of mind.

Sidling out as I had come in, earning the curses which all win who tread on tender feet, I arrived at the spot where the man stood, and then—the horrid truth which L—'s words had caused me to suspect, dawned in its fulness upon my mind, and desolation swept across me.

The man had made a mistake. He had confounded my name—confound him!—with that of my learned friend of the same name on the Southern Circuit, the very man of whom L— had spoken. Not knowing the gentleman he was told to instruct, he had asked a colleague if each fresh comer from the robing hall bore the style, in which I rejoice, and unluckily for me it happened that I came up before my namesake, and the colleague who made it his business to acquaint

himself with the name and abode of each member of the bar, old or young, had told the wretch that my name was Jones. Acting upon this meagre information, Messrs. D——'s clerk put the brief into my hands—and now, the real Simon Pura having been discovered, it behoved me to surrender my supposed gain—all the apologies of my misleader, humble though they were even to abjectness, not serving to compensate me for the loss of ten guineas, the dignity of the thing, and the prospect which had been before me of seeing my name in the newspapers in connection with one of the most important cases that was tried that term. After such an event I could not go back to the Queen's Bench, but turned a sadder and a poorer man into the adjoining Court of Exchequer.

An old judge—I might say a very old judge—was sitting on the bench, looking like the impersonation of law, and of all that was dignified and venerable in man. He was one who had been easily chief as a student at college, and no less easily chief as a junior counsel at the bar. His name was associated with many a famous case, of which the memory even of the bills of costs had perished; he had survived the clients of his early days, and while yet a young man, had 'gone lightly o'er low steps' in the road to advancement; now his name was considered to be a synonym for justice, and those who sometimes questioned the manner in which he laid down the law, did not venture to question his law itself; and they readily pardoned the privileges which old age assumed, for sake of the time when these were not needed; and because of the comprehensive grasp of the old man's mind, which enabled him to apprehend a thing in its entirety, without bestowing upon it his whole attention.

A special jury case was on, and the jurymen's names were being called over by the associate of the Court. The name of a most intimate friend, from whom I had parted only that morning, was called out from the box, and though surprised, for he had not told me of his having been sum-

moned, I quite expected to see him step forward and answer. Imagine my dismay when a shabbily-dressed man who had been standing near the 'well' of the Court, made the melancholy announcement that my friend had been dead three months. A momentary regret passed through my midriff as I thought of R——'s amiable wife and three young children; but it was momentary only, for I knew quite well that R—— was alive this very morning, and had left me not two hours ago for his office in Jute Street. There was some mistake, but in the interests of R——, who I knew hated jury summonses, I did not think it incumbent on me to right it. Several names were called to which no answers were given, and there seemed to be but a poor chance of making up the jury. Nine were in the box—three more were wanted, and of two of those who remained to be called over, the shabbily-dressed man announced the same doleful tidings that he had announced about my friend. Who was this that took such an interest in special jurors that he knew to a nicety the dates of their decease, and came there to volunteer the information which he had himself acquired? For he spoke evidently as *amicus curiæ*—he was not an official person, yet because perhaps that his statements were made voluntarily, no one questioned the correctness of his speech. The judge made some remarks about the carelessness of the sheriffs in keeping dead men's names upon the panel, the counsel for the plaintiff prayed a 'tales,' and the jury was completed by common jurors. The case went on, but the shabby man interested me. He was evidently a frequenter of the Courts, and appeared to be known to the ushers and people in attendance; and I thought he was perhaps some retired attorney or barrister who made it his hobby to get up the histories of jurors, and was believed therefore, as a matter of course. It was not until afterwards I learned from R——, to whom I announced his own death, that he paid this man so much a year to kill him when inconvenient summonses came, on which occasions he sent them to the shabbily-dressed

man, who instantly committed such homicide as would be sufficient to excuse the victim from attendance at Westminster.

The case was one for a special jury—compensation case for damages done through negligence of a servant—and a great fight for the verdict was expected. The counsel engaged for the defence were an eminent Queen's Counsel and a 'junior'—*etatis sue* 45—who was reckoned one of the best of stuff gownsmen. Their battery was a strong one, and they wore upon their faces an expression of quiet satisfaction which betokened the comfortable assurance they felt of being able to silence whatever artillery might be brought against them.

'Who are for the plaintiffs?' I inquired of the man next me.

'Serjeant—— and P——, a new junior, I believe.'

'P—— of the Home Circuit?'

'Yes.'

'He'll have hard work against little S——,' I remarked, 'unless the serjeant helps him more than he is wont to do. Is the serjeant here?'

'I have not seen him,' answered my friend, 'and some one said just now he would not come.'

'Poor fellow!' I exclaimed, for I knew P—— to be the very quintessence of nervousness. 'Surely he is given over into the hands of the Philistines,' and so indeed it seemed. P——'s leader was not in Court, P—— could not learn anything about him, and it seemed to be pretty certain that if the case went on, P—— would have to conduct it himself.

Poor P——! there he sat, looking unusually pale and suffering evidently from the suppressed excitement which was born of the strange position in which he found himself. He sat there in his place behind the leader's bench, with books and papers before him, in formidable array: his brief, which he bound and loosed from its tape bonds at least ten times in as many minutes, was in his left hand, and the fingers of his right hand unconsciously played the devil's tattoo with a quill pen on the red baize desk: his eyes looked

wistfully at the side door, as he watched for the coming of him who came not. Little S——, his opponent, whispered words of soothing into his leader's ear. The pair smiled benignly on each other, and looked across at my poor nervous friend, who was unknown to them as well as to fame, with a glance in which pity mingled with some professional scorn.

The jury were sworn, and had settled themselves to their duty with that expression of resigned unwillingness on their faces which jurymen of all sorts are wont to wear. The counsel for the defence untied their briefs and opened them out leisurely on the slope. The Court was all attention, reposing its chin on its hands; there remained nothing to be done but to open the case for the plaintiff.

I looked across at P——, no longer watching the side door, but gazing curiously at the judge, who stared down at him. The nervous, restless look was intensified to the utmost, but to my surprise and relief there was no appearance of confusion. I knew P—— to have a strong will and a stronger sense of duty, and rejoiced as I saw, or fancied I saw, these two coming to his assistance against his own nervous system and the two skilled verdict-getters who now threatened him.

A dead silence for about a minute was broken by the judge uttering with some significance, as he still looked hard at P——, the monosyllables, 'Well, sir!'

P—— rose and said in a voice tremulous as that of him who hears his own notes alone, for the first time in a public place—

'I hope your lordship will forgive me for keeping the Court waiting. My leader is absent in the other Court and will be here directly. I have sent for him.'

'Oh, sir,' said the judge—grinning a grim grin as he said it—'your leader intends to give you an opportunity of distinguishing yourself. You'd better begin.'

The jury laughed, the 'learned friends' on the other side laughed, and all the 'learned men' in Court chuckled at the facetious judge, who

was unable to resist the temptation of saying a smart thing even to a man so evidently nervous as poor P—. I trembled for P—, but he was no way dismayed. On the contrary, the judge's joke stood him in excellent stead; it lent him that slight touch of indignation, gave him that sufficient wounding of his *amour propre* which enabled him to send his adversaries to the right about, and not only so, but to his own and his friends' surprise, to take part in the amusement of which he himself was the occasion.

'Your lordship is aware that there are two ways of distinguishing one's self,' said P—, anxious now to gain time, and glad to use the means the Court had unexpectedly provided for him. 'And I cannot but feel that I shall be as distinguished as poor Denmark beside the allies, if I am to be deprived of the assistance of my learned leader.'

'My brother will no doubt be here,' said the leader on the other side, 'meantime you can go on.' And then followed some 'chaff,' as mild as that which had gone before, about the absent 'brother' being the learned counsel's big brother (Serjeant — was a very little one), and the probable consequences to him of pushing on the case in the absence of the same, a disclaimer on the part of the 'other side' against being taken for the representatives of those 'distinguished foreigners,' the allies against Denmark, *cum multis aliis*, which wasted a good ten minutes, allowing Serjeant — time to come up, and would have lasted ten minutes more had not Mr. Baron — somewhat testily remarked that Mr. P— could 'at all events open the pleadings, which Mr. P— said 'of course, he could do,' and proceeded to do, with a boldness which was the inspiration of the moment.

It is the duty of the junior counsel to begin under any circumstances, so that there was as yet nothing falling to the share of P— which would not have fallen had Serjeant — been there. P— told 'my lord and the jury' how that John Styles was the plaintiff and John Giles was the defendant, and that

the plaintiff sued the defendant 'for that;' and then he read the interesting document known as the declaration, from which it appeared that John Giles was an exceedingly bad man, who hired servants known by him to be incompetent, and also to be very skilful in breaking other folk's legs; that he was habitually negligent as to the way in which he conducted his business; and so far as the matter now before the Court was concerned, had 'so negligently, carelessly, and improperly conducted himself in that behalf,' that by his approved unskilful servant he had 'broken, wounded, crushed, bruised, and maimed' the leg of John Styles, who being a carman, earning a pound a week, valued his injured limb at 1,000*l*.

A thousand pounds seemed a moderate sum to ask for injuries which required so many adjectives to describe them; but John Giles said on the pleadings, that he was 'not guilty,' and privately that Mr. Styles might go to a warmer climate for the money he sought to recover. 'Upon this plea,' said P—, 'issue has been joined, and that is the case for trial before you.'

As a matter of fact, I believe the plaintiff was a carter, who had gone with his master's cart to take some marble slabs from defendant's yard. The defendant was fifty miles away at the time, but his foreman and helpers went to load the cart, and the plaintiff, though he did not fetch the slabs out of the yard, nevertheless helped to make them fast in the van, which he was bound to protect. While they were making one of the slabs fast, the foreman jumped out of the van and shook it, a slab fell over and broke the carter's leg. The action was against the master for the negligence of his servant.

The point was a fine one, for if Styles could be made out to have been acting as defendant's servant, or as a voluntary helper, he must be nonsuited. Only if he could be shown to have been independent of defendant's orders, and to have been engaged upon the slabs in the capacity of his own master's servant, had he a cause of action. It was sailing rather close to the wind, as his leader

himself told him in consultation; and indeed, but for P——'s showing him the principal case on which he had relied, and which the learned serjeant, who had not read his brief, had not, therefore, had occasion to look up, that gentleman had declared there was no case.

Just as P—— was finishing his opening statement to the jury, a slight commotion was heard at the entrance to the Court, and, to the manifest joy and delight of P——, Serjeant—— came in like a frigate in full sail. Nodding good-humouredly to all around, the serjeant seized the brief which his clerk held before him, and without slipping the tape off, rose, as P—— sat down, and proceeded to address the jury as though he had long been master of the case, and had not—as in truth he had—been put in possession of the facts only two hours before in consultation.

You would have thought, to hear the serjeant, that he had been engaged in loading slabs in vans all his life long; that until this particular moment he had never done aught else, and had now come into Court for the sole purpose of telling the jury how his work was done. Then he laboured to show that the defendant had admitted the plaintiff's case; said he should call witnesses to prove it, as well as to depose to the serious nature of the injuries done to the plaintiff, as set forth in such harrowing terms in the declaration. This done, he sat down, and P—— proceeded to call the first witness for the plaintiff—the plaintiff himself.

A slight pause, after which the usher cried with a loud voice—pitched as though he had a personal quarrel with the witness—for John Styles to appear. A movement at the end of the Court, and then a man as impotent-looking as he who could not crawl into the Pool of Bethesda, was brought forward by two supporters and lifted into the witness-box. A chair was provided for him, and, bound and becrutched, he showed like a victim to all the woes contained in Pandora's box.

P—— elicited the details of the case, vainly trying to make the witness declare himself other than he

was evidently desirous of representing himself to be, viz., a willing helper to the men engaged in loading the van; for P—— felt the danger of the man proving himself a volunteer, in the sense of an unremunerated and free helper. 'The other side' smiled as the examination went on, and positively glowed with pleasure when his lordship interrupted P—— by remarking that, as far as he had heard, he could not understand what case there was.

Up sprang the serjeant, snatching the book which P—— had shown him only a few hours before, from P——'s hand, and with the air of a man who is suffering intolerably from some sudden wrong, entreated his lordship to refrain from any expression of opinion until the case had been fully gone into, adding, however, with special reference to the remark about there being 'no case,' that he held in his hand a judgment on which he very much relied, and to which he must beg his lordship's attention.

'My learned friend knows something of the case, I believe,' said the serjeant, as he handed the book to the usher, and nodded good-humouredly at Mr. Q. C., who had shown cause in this very case, and who now muttered something about the two cases being distinguishable.

The judge took the book from the hand of the associate, who had received it from his lordship's clerk, who had received it from the usher, who had received it from the serjeant; and after scanning the outside of it, and looking at the fly-leaf to see the owner's name, proceeded to read the judgment to which his attention had been drawn. Whilst his lordship read there was much signalling and undertone talk between the members of the bar and the attendants in Court. The words 'non-suit'—'point reserved'—'new trial,' came from the 'other side,' accompanied by much shaking of heads, which meant great things, doubtless, to the initiated in such signs, for they shook their heads in return, and both sides seemed perfectly satisfied.

'Do you think, sir, the judge is with us?' said a man sitting behind

me, and who I gathered, from the use of the pronoun 'us,' was interested in the case.

'I don't know,' I answered; 'he seems to be in a good humour.'

'Has humour anything to do with his being for or against us, sir?' inquired the man. 'I should not have thought so.'

'Perhaps not,' I replied; 'but judges are only men, and all men are subject to bouts of indigestion.' The man seemed to be lost in wonder on finding that even judges were not impassible; and was even more astonished at the familiarity which existed between the opposed 'counsel' than Mr. Pickwick was when his leader shook hands with the counsel for Mrs. Bardell. The judge finished his earnest perusal of the volume, and laying the book down on its face, said, 'This is a very important case; it is nearly your case,' looking towards P—.

'It is our case, my lord,' rejoined P—.

'Well,' observed the judge, 'I do not see how the matter can rest here, with a verdict. It must go into the full Court, and possibly to the Court above. Is it not a case for a settlement?'

P— beamed with satisfaction. He had raked out the case in question, and mainly on the strength of it he had advised the action being brought. He had withstood his own leader with it in consultation, and now it came in the face of the judge's expressed opinion. 'The other side' looked a little disconcerted, but was glad 'his lordship had thrown out this expression of opinion.' Then came a laying of heads together by the counsel engaged, assisted by the attorneys on either side, who leaned over the back of the 'well' in which they were confined, and deferred to the wisdom of those whom they had entrusted with the case. His lordship read the newspaper, the jury stood up and stretched their legs in the jury-box, and Mr. C. D. the eminent (in that he was six feet high) junior counsel, who drew portraits many, though pleadings few, sketched the scene before him, as a whole and in parts, upsetting the

gravity which resides under the wig, and moving every one to laughter by the absurdity and justness of his caricature likenesses.

The conference was of no avail. Counsel could not agree. The case must go on; so P— finished his examination of the plaintiff, and Mr. Q. C. rose to cross-examine.

Little was elicited by this means, beyond the fact that the plaintiff had undoubtedly helped, but whether as a volunteer, or as his own master's servant, was the somewhat fine question which was left for the jury. And now a man, whose personal appearance had already attracted considerable attention, was called. He had been sitting by the side of the solicitor in charge of the case, and was evidently much interested in the issue of the trial. He had been present at an interview between plaintiff and defendant, and was to bear witness to what had passed. He was a fine-looking man, apparently a foreigner, with an animated expression of countenance, and a costume which, the place and occasion considered, was truly wonderful. Whether it was the way in which he found expression for the respect which his nature felt for the tribunals of the kingdom, or whether it was the custom in his country so to appear before the courts, did not come out: but this gentleman was attired in full evening dress, with an elaborately worked shirt, diamond studs, and a coat which Mr. Poole's eye might have pronounced faultless. No distinction had been made between him and the other witnesses in the cause, as I cannot help thinking there should have been. It was scarcely right in the usher to allow so magnificently clad a man to herd with the 'seedy' crew who filled as of right that abyss in the halls of justice known as 'the well'; unless, and perhaps he was correct after all, the usher thought of him as Lafou thought of Parolles, in 'All's Well that Ends Well,' that 'the scarfs and bannerets about him did manifoldly dissuade him from believing him a vessel of too great burden.' Anyhow, there he sat in the 'well' till his name was called out by the usher,

in as indignant a voice as that in which the first witness had been desired to stand forth. Then he started to his feet as if the ground under them had suddenly grown red hot, and made his way over blue bags, papers, and the legs of attorneys' clerks, to the witness-box. Serjeant — introduced him to the judge as Count Dieudon, a Frenchman, while the associate explained, as much by signs as by words, that the gentleman must remove the white kid glove from his right hand, in order to hold the sacred book on which he was to swear to tell the whole truth and nothing but that. There being some difficulty in explaining this, his lordship thought the delay was caused by the witness objecting to take the oath, and thinking further, perhaps, that Count Dieudon, who was as good a Christian as is to be found throughout all Leicester Square, might possibly, from his general appearance, be of the Hebrew faith, rather testily told the associate to ask the witness if he were a Jew. The bare suggestion caused a current of eloquence to flow from the Frenchman, so strong and continuous, that it bid fair to supersede, in the attention of the Court, the case which was actually before it. His lordship at length succeeded in conveying to the speaker an assurance of his want of intention to insult him; M. Dieudon succeeded in getting the white kid glove off his right hand; and the associate succeeded in swearing him in the words of the oath.

'Did I understand you to say that the gentleman was a count?' inquired the judge.

'He is so, my lord,' answered P—.

'Of the Roman Empire or the French?' asked his lordship, with a smile.

'One of the *indebitatus counts*, I believe, my lord,' said Mr. Q. C., at which remark his lordship smiled again, and Count Dieudon, who did not understand the allusion, and thought they were but settling the exact degree of his rank, smiled also.

Count Dieudon had evidently made the English language his

study, and was, moreover, evidently well satisfied with the progress he had made in it. He had also given to the world three large volumes on the Science of Agriculture, which he had with him in the witness-box, in case, I suppose, any question should arise upon that subject in the course of the trial of a complaint for broken limbs. As this was far from likely, it seemed rather unnecessary for him thus to burden himself; but these three volumes were on the ledge before him, and served, at all events, to show the judge how he should spell the witness's and author's name, which was given to him by the learned serjeant as Dewdong, and by the more learned (in French at least) friend on 'the other side,' as Döodone. The name and address of M. Dieudon having been written on the judge's notes, and a further note having been made as the only means of stopping iteration of the fact, that M. Dieudon was author of the great work in question, Serjeant — got the range, and began to fire into the witness's stock of information.

M. Dieudon gesticulated a good deal, poured forth volumes of Franco-English in copious answer to the questions put to him, and gave to many English words a pronunciation which reminded one of French spoken by Dan Chaucer's prioress; who spoke French 'full fayre and fetisly after the schole of Statford-atte-Bow.' So with M. Dieudon and his English. He spoke 'full fayre and fetisly,' but not after the school of Westminster Hall. He might with propriety have gone home and told his countrymen what the Irishman told his friends of the French, that they were a very stupid people, who did not even understand their own language; for it was undoubtedly true that practice and use were both essential to a right understanding of what M. Dieudon had to say. Serjeant — came to that part of his examination where it behoved the witness to relate what had passed between plaintiff and defendant during the interview at which he had been present: and as M. Dieudon was both tenacious of being

thought able to speak the counsel's own tongue, and also very voluble in his talk, the serjeant deemed it advisable to beg the witness to relate the conversation, instead of getting at it by means of questions. M. Dieudon readily complied, and with the air of a Jullien and the voice of a Berryer, he told his simple tale; but when he came to the key of the whole conversation—the important part, where it was supposed the defendant had promised, as alleged in a second count, to pay the plaintiff a sum of money—he failed altogether to convey an accurate notion of what had taken place.

'Miszer Steel he come to défendant, an say, "Your man break my leg, and make me evil (me fit mal). You récompense me. I live in hospital four, five month. Get not work; lose my living. What you give me?" Défendant, he say nussing. Miszer Steel he press for answer, but défendant shake his head. He stay a long time to make answer, and zen he say nussing.'

This evidence, which, more than all the arguments based upon ethnological grounds, convinced me of the affinity between French and Irish Celts, served also to upset the gravity of the Court, which fairly laughed out, and with every wish to do no uncivil thing, could not refrain from seizing this particular opportunity for mirth. The count was not further interrogated, and with, I fear, but hurt feelings, departed from the box with the great work in three volumes, which was evidently the pride and joy of his soul.

Michael Sullivan, the man who had done the mischief, and upon whom his master had already thrown the blame of the entire action, was next called, and impressed by the duty which lay upon him to observe reticence upon the subject to be investigated, was more evasive in his answers even than his countrymen are wont to be.

'Did you see the accident?'

'I did not, sir.'

'Where you present at the time it occurred?'

'I was, sir.'

'Did you see a slab fall over in the van?'

'I did, sir.'

'Did it fall on plaintiff's leg?'

'I can't say.'

'Do you believe it did?'

'I think it did, sir.'

'Then you saw the accident?'

'I did not, sir.'

'But you saw the slab fall, and think it went on to plaintiff's leg?'

'I did, sir.'

'Then you think you may say you saw the accident, may you not?'

'I do not, sir.'

And after much further bandying of words, it was found out that the witness had seen everything except the actual snapping of the bone in the leg. He had seen the slab fall, he had seen the leg after it had been crushed, he was certain the slab fell upon the leg, and yet, for the reason above given, he declined to assert what nevertheless the jury believed, that he had witnessed the accident.

'Now, sir!' said Serjeant —, twitching his gown, and pushing his wig the least bit back on his head, and looking a little fiercely at Michael, 'did you not jump out of the van before the slabs were secured within it?'

'I did, sir.'

'Did that shake the van?'

'It did, sir.'

'Did not the slab fall over immediately afterwards?'

'It did, sir.'

'Did not the slab fall over because you shook the van?'

'I can't say, sir.'

'What was there besides to make the slab fall over?'

'I can't say, sir.'

'Did not you say, referring to the accident, that is a bad piece of work I have done; I was a fool to jump out like that?'

'I was not a fool!' retorted the witness, sharply; 'and I'll thank ye not to say so again.'

'Answer my question, sir,' replied the serjeant. 'Did you say so or not?'

'They're vary impertinent quessions ye'll be askin', said Michael.

'Will you be kind enough to answer them?' said the serjeant.

'I don't rhemember.'

'Try and recollect, now. You *must* know if you said so or not.'

'I don't remember.'
'Will you swear you did not say so?'

'I will not.'
'Did you say so?'
'I don't remember.'
'Will you swear that?'

'I will; I'll swear I don't remember, and I'll swear if I do remember, I forget.'

'Very well,' said the serjeant, joining in the laugh, which was general at this utter discomfiture of his hopes. 'Now, try to remember very distinctly this: Had you not been drinking this morning before the accident occurred?'

'Ah, no!' said Michael, with the earnestness of a man tented on some point of special pride to himself.

'Are you sure of that?'

'Quite,' said Michael.
'Would you forget, if you did remember this, too?' inquired the serjeant.

'I can't tell,' said Michael.
'Now, do you mean to tell me you had not been drinking on this particular morning?'

'I had some *tay*,' answered Michael.

'No, no!' retorted the serjeant; 'I do not mean "*tay*." Had you not been into a public-house that day?'

'I had not.'
'Not to have a friendly glass with any one? You know there is nothing to blame you for if you had done so.'

'I had not,' was the answer.
'Then you were not drunk on that morning, you will swear?' asked the serjeant.

Michael did not answer directly, but looked somewhat archly into the well of the court, as if to seek inspiration from his master and the attorney, who were sitting there. The instructions in the serjeant's brief were that the man had been drinking, and there was other testimony to show that he was 'all by the head' before he began loading.

'I don't think I was drunk,' answered Michael, after an interval.

'You don't *think* you were drunk,' repeated the questioner, somewhat curiously. 'What do you mean? You told us just now you had not been drinking.'

'I had a sup the night afore,' added Michael, with the air of a man who has absolved his conscience.

'Oh, indeed!' said the serjeant, brightening up, for even he, astute as he was, could not divine how a man could get drunk on any given occasion without imbibing anything stronger than '*tay*.' 'Now, do you think you had sufficiently recovered from the effects of the sup the night afore to be able to load the van properly on this particular morning?'

'I think it'd been better if I hadn't taken it,' replied Michael, now fairly unmasked.

'Oh! you were not drunk, but you think it would have been better you had not taken this sup the night afore. Very well, I have nothing more to ask you.' And the witness stood down.

Application was now made to the judge that ladies might be requested to leave the Court, it being proposed to call the medical evidence to prove the nature of some injuries which were included in the 'otherwise seriously damaged and hurt' of the declaration. The request was at once acceded to, and the Court, by the usher, its mouth-piece, proclaimed aloud that all ladies were to leave the Court. A flutter ensued among the petticoats, and many went their way, with an expression mingled of surprise and indignation upon the faces of the wearers of them, as though they resented the notion of raising and then disappointing their curiosity. I say many went their way, but not all; some there were who put a bold—their expelled sisters called it a brazen—face upon the matter, and stuck to their seats like women whose desire for knowledge is greater than their sense of shame. His lordship looked round upon these law-loving dames, and remarked, in a significant tone, that he had directed all ladies to quit the Court. It was at this particular moment that the usher became immortal, not knowing, however, the greatness of the fame which he was laying up for himself. Whether he really did not see the bonnets, whose unshamefaced owners kept

them obstinately in the halls of justice, or whether it was in the profundity of his scorn that he spake it, this deponent sheweth not, but in answer to the remark thrown out by the learned judge, came from the usher the pride-killing words, 'All the ladies have left the Court, my lord.'

A smile, and then a titter, which waxed speedily till it became a laugh, was observable on the faces of judge, jurors, and counsel. Even a blush flitted across the countenances of the unshamefaced ones, and the usher stood a satirist confessed in the middle of the Court. His lordship adopted the meaning which all hearers attached to the words of the censor, himself as much astonished at his speech as the most amused one there, and, looking towards Serjeant —, said that he might now proceed, since the modest women had left the Court.

The trial proceeded, the terrible nature of the injuries received by the plaintiff was explained to the jury, and medical testimony was heard in support of the case.

Now his lordship had a way of notifying counsel of his having written down upon his notes the answers of the witnesses, which many of those addressed disliked, almost to resistance point. He did not raise his head and nod, as judges are wont, but kept his face still fixed in the direction of his paper, uttering in a sort of undergrowl, as a sign for counsel to proceed, the monosyllables 'Go on!' It was not so much the use of these two good words that vexed the hearts of the learned, it was the manner of the user. Many had been the complaints made in robing-room and in hall, of the bearish (so they termed it) method which his lordship adopted, and among the complainants was none so bitter as Mr. Q. C., who was for the defence in this action. He had fretted and fumed visibly during the whole of the time he was cross-examining, and all who knew him were well aware that ere long an explosion must take place.

His lordship had taken down the evidence which Mr. Q. C. elicited from the witness, and, being no respecter of persons, had notified

the fact in his usual way to the great man before him. Mr. Q. C. could not endure it longer; he made no fresh attempt to question the witness, but stood stock still as in respectful attention, waiting his lordship's leisure to continue.

'Go on!' repeated his lordship, but silence still reigned; Mr. Q. C.'s head became a little more erect, his eyes dilated a trifle more, and the starch in the large neckerchief which enwound his throat seemed 'to bear him stiffly up,' as Hamlet desired his sinews might bear him.

'I said, "Go on!"' observed his lordship, somewhat testily, raising his eyes rather than his head, to look at the counsel.

The moment had arrived for the expected explosion; his lordship himself had fired the train. As men who watch some curious and new experiment, the bar stood at gaze, while Mr. Q. C., with an expression of deep astonishment and concern, stirred himself from his pointer-like attitude of attention, and exclaimed with loud and seemingly contrite voice:—'I beg your lordship's pardon, I thought you were speaking to the usher.'

Respect for the Bench kept down open mirth, and Mr. Q. C., with the tact of a general who knows how to follow up a victory, without crushing the enemy it is his interest to keep in the field, proceeded with his examination as if nothing unusual had happened. His lordship endured in silence, and bided his time for an answer.

P—, to my surprise and delight, did gloriously, not being disconcerted even when the judge, not knowing his name, and wishing to call him by it, desired the intermediates before mentioned as sitting between judge and counsel, to acquire this information for him. The stage whisper in which the inquiries were made one of the other, telling all whom it might concern that P— was unknown to the frequenters of this Court, did not cover him with confusion; I fancied I detected even a sort of satisfied look upon his face as, in answer to the last inquirer, he showed his name on his brief, whereon was

marked a sum equal to that which potentially had been mine in the case of the Great Western Railway.

When Mr. Q. C. rose to cross-examine, some question as to the admissibility of the evidence he thought to elicit, occurred to that learned gentleman's mind. He wished to remove it; and also, perhaps, by taking his lordship into his confidence, to mollify through an appeal to his *amour-propre*, the evil prejudice which the late rasping had occasioned. It was, therefore, in a peculiarly insinuating way that he announced his intention of adducing the questionable evidence, and in a still more insinuating way, that he asked his lordship whether he thought it would be admissible.

Now it was strangely forgetful, in a man so astute as Mr. Q. C. undoubtedly was, so to act. He might have put forward the evidence and waited for his appeal to the judge until such time as the opposing counsel objected formally; or he might have announced his intention to put it forward, and proceeded to execution without inviting, as he did, the interference of a man he had offended. As it was, he gave himself over into the hands of Samson, and suffered accordingly.

His lordship failed to notice Mr. Q. C.'s first inquiry, maintaining the firm demeanour he had worn since the learned gentleman's tongue had lashed his indignation into a desire to find vent; but when Mr. Q. C. once more asked, as eager to be instructed, whether his lordship thought this would be evidence, Baron — raised his head, looked straight into the lantern above him, and said to the lantern, as though he were delivering himself of an abstract proposition for the special edification of the lantern:—'Her Majesty and the House of Lords are the only persons entitled to ask me any legal questions.' This, uttered in a monotone, without passion, but with entire deliberateness, fell as falls a killing frost upon the tender plant. Not that Mr. Q. C. resembled a tender plant though, for he was among his brethren as the oak in a forest—yet, no less did he feel

keenly the chilling blast of his lordship's oracular breath. He feigned not to notice what everybody else noticed; he stammered out something; he looked confused, and at last said he should not press the evidence if his lordship did not think it worth while.

His lordship expressed no opinion whatever, but being wearied with the long day's sitting, and being desirous, perhaps, not to risk losing the vantage ground he had manifestly gained, once more proposed to his brother, Serjeant —, to consider whether the case was not one for a compromise. Serjeant — having freely admitted that he thought the justice of the case required some such solution, his lordship announced that he would adjourn the Court to enable counsel to come to some arrangement. His lordship had risen to go, and had stamped his way over half the length of the platform, when a very junior counsel, in a state of terrible trepidation, rose to make a motion to the Court. Blue bags and red bags, books and papers, the owners of these, and the clerks of the owners, were bundling out of the Court; the registrar had already stretched himself a weary stretch in token of the ending of the day's work; the usher, henceforth immortal, had girded up his loins to go—when the faint echo of the very junior counsel's voice resounded through the Court. His lordship stood in half attention for a second, looked hard at the speaker, and then, resuming his walk towards the door curtain, was understood to say 'To-morrow! To-morrow!' and so went out. The very junior counsel could not get a hearing, and before the solicitor who had instructed him had finished the tale of his reproaches, I fled forth into Westminster Hall, and told this tale to my friends, the cherubim in the roof.

'Tell it not, save in St. Bride's Avenue,' said they, as I left them to their darkness and the gloom in which they have thriven so long.

'I will not,' answered I; and I have kept my word.

CELEBS IN SEARCH OF A MULREADY ENVELOPE.

A Liverpool Romance.

IN THREE CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER I.

'WE MET—'T WAS IN A CROWD.'

IT was at a party Mrs. Furnival gave a few months ago that I first saw Laura Matilda. Mr. Furnival is chief of the great firm of Furnival and Co., one of the greatest mercantile houses in Liverpool. Everyone knows Furnival and Co., and if they do not, they ought, which makes it much the same thing.

Many a pleasant party has Mrs. Furnival given, but never shall I forget this memorable one at which I first saw Laura Matilda.

Would that my readers could see her as I saw her that night, all gauzy and shiny, a fairy in robes of blue and silver; she was most truly a phantom of delight, and I may also mention that she wore a wreath of roses. When first my eye fell upon her, she was standing by the piano, talking to Helen Furnival, who had been playing, and who is, I may mention here, in case I should forget it afterwards in the absorbing interest of my story, one of the jolliest girls in the world—never makes game of a fellow, and is an out-and-out brick.

I had been dancing with a tall girl—a very tall girl, five foot eight in satin boots—and had just yielded her up to a very small man, who pleaded her previous engagement to him, and having nothing to do, leant against the wall, pondering on human rashness, as displayed in the case of the small man who had just walked off with my partner. She was not too much for me, but a perfect extinguisher to one of his size. As I said, I was standing against the wall looking at nothing in particular, when my eye fell on Laura Matilda, as she stood talking to Miss Furnival, and assisting her friend in the buttoning of a glove. In

thinking over the matter since, I have never been able to account for the curious thrill which touched my very heart when I first looked at her. From head to foot I felt as if I were entirely composed of pulses going at the most tremendous pace; pulses in my hands, pulses in my chest, pulses in my knees, pulses in my elbows, dozens of them in my head, and the biggest of them all coming up my throat and choking me. Nothing can I do but gaze at her, until the beating pulses seemed all to stand still, and then rush up to the roof of my head. Headless of the dancers passing me, indifferent to the music ringing in my ears, regardless of having my eyes almost brushed out of my head by whirling *jupons* (is not that the proper term?) dashing by, careless of all public opinion, I stood riveted to the spot, gazing at the fair vision. I was in a state of insensibility to all external objects but one; and so absorbed was I, that when the passing waltzers trod many times on my feet, I knew not, until long afterwards, what it was that had wounded my pet corn and my patent-leather boots. In a few words, it was a case of love at first sight; for before I had looked at her many minutes I was hopelessly in love, just as violently as we hear the young Russian prince is with the fair daughter of Denmark.

It was with some difficulty a little while after—I am afraid to say how long, for time passed so rapidly gazing at this peerless creature—I brought down my intellect to the present moment sufficiently to reply to Mrs. Furnival's offer of getting me a partner. I can never be sufficiently thankful for having had presence of mind enough to

make known my wishes to my kind hostess. 'Seize the moments as they fly,' Dr. Watts, or somebody says, and I lost not one in requesting to be introduced to the lady talking to Miss Farnival at the piano. I was almost bewildered at my own good fortune as we crossed the room, and too dizzy to take in more than that the presentation had taken place. 'Mr. Benson—Miss Jones,' so the bewitching creature was called Jones!

I believe I asked her for a quadrille; I know I must, for we stood up together at the side of one just forming, and if I asked her as I felt at the moment, there must have been a world of deep passion in my voice.

I am sorry now, since the opportunity is past, that I did not look at the other fellows, to see how they felt at my good fortune; but I am sure they were madly jealous when they saw who my partner was. Then I thought of what I had best say to her, but could not invent a single remark good enough to make to such a girl. There was a fellow opposite to me talking like steam to a girl, and I thought if I could only overhear one or two of his sentences, it might give me a start; but Mrs. Farnival's room was too wide for that. Then I heard the fellow next me say to his partner—

'Hot, isn't it?' and she said, 'Rather.'

So I said to myself, 'Well, that is as good a thing to begin with as any other remark;' and turning to Laura Matilda (I did not then know her Christian name) I said—

'Hot, isn't it?' and like the other girl she said, 'Rather!' and then I was, as the schoolboys say, stumped. Then it was our turn to advance, so I was not obliged to say anything more until the second quadrille had commenced, and in the meantime I turned over every subject I could think of, one after another; but not one idea would come. The more I searched, the less came; and to add to my dilemma, the fellow who first said 'Hot, isn't it?' had gone right on, and was now deep in 'Lady Audley's Secret,' and I had missed hearing how he had managed to reach it. Never was so unhappy a

wretch! We were again back in our places, and my time had come again, but I had nothing to say; all I could do, was—and Laura Matilda has since told me I did it to perfection—to look like a fool.

The reader should have been in my place to understand my rapture when my fair partner, as if divining my embarrassment, relieved it by opening the campaign herself, and saying in a sweet, low, hesitating voice,—

'Do you collect foreign postage stamps?'

Now, if there was a modern mania which my soul utterly abhorred, it was this passion for making collections of postage stamps. Never did I lose an opportunity of inveighing against it in the strongest language. The idea—the bare idea of filling up great albums with old used stamps! I could see no sense in it, no object in it, nothing to excuse people besetting you everywhere you went for trumpery stamps, entreating you to pledge yourself to collect for them rubbish only fit to be thrown behind the fire.

'And what is the use of it?' utilitarians naturally ask; and I never yet met the stamp collector who could give a satisfactory answer to this simple question. Shades of our ancestors! our sober forefathers of the Georges' times! come back and see to what we of this degenerate century have come!

It had come to this point with me, that I would not take life on the terms of being a martyr to this modern insanity. It was too bad that, because one happened to be learning business in a Liverpool counting house, his life was to be made a burthen to him. At this time I was in the habit of receiving on an average three letters per week from country cousins, all imploring, nay, even commanding me to send them by return of post a good many stamps, particularly those mentioned in a list enclosed; while a few kindly granted me a week to light on obsolete ones, all declaring it was absolutely necessary for their peace of mind they should have a large quantity without further delay. I do believe their belief in Liver-

pool and its stamps was as strong as poor Whittington's belief in the golden pavements of London; and that they thought the number of stamps thrown out of the counting-houses daily would require an additional force of able-bodied scavengers to clear away the heaps. There is my Aunt Dorothy, a fair type of the old ladies who plague you for them to be sold for charity, and who carry them down to the country, fleecing all the schoolboys in the neighbourhood in the sale of them, for the benefit of some pet society, at exorbitant prices. Refuse her stern commands if you dare—few do. Then there are all my cousins, from the young ladies who beseech of you, writing in a fine Italian hand, in which all the letters on a level with each other—the m's n's, i's, u's, w's, v's, g's, o's, and a's—look much alike; down through the various stages of text hand to round hand in the largest characters, the cry of all is, postage stamps! foreign postage stamps! and all refuse to be satisfied. Then there are my sisters, and they have schoolfellows—such sweet girls!—who are all collecting postage stamps. The very servants come to you begging for them. And the summing up of all is, that life is not worth having if this mania continues, and one is to spend it in a Liverpool counting-house. Why must the world combine to drive one into Bedlam?

Some days before Mrs. Furnival's party, a rumour had gone abroad that the house was going to send one of its young men out to China, and having a strong idea that I should be the one chosen, I had gone over to Birkenhead the evening before, to consult with my uncle there, as to what course I should adopt, supposing the offer were made to me. It was a matter for grave consideration, and much ventilation of private affairs; and believing uncle and I were quite alone in the dining-room, I had spoken very freely, not hesitating to mention names—when—imagine my horror—a small voice came from under the table, a child's voice, and said:—

'I wish you *would* go to China, cousin Harry, and send home lots of stamps.'

It was perfectly insufferable. I know I had no right to object to Charlie falling asleep under the table when he ought to have been in bed, but I seriously objected to him waking up and beginning about his stamps, as if there were nothing else in life of the slightest importance to be attended to but the accumulation of postage stamps.

I wonder Charlie had not more caution than to touch on the subject: it was a sign he was only half awake, and at the mention of any foreign country instinctively broke out into stamps, for I had been so beset and annoyed about these detestable things, that I had solemnly cautioned my most intimate associates, under a threat of immediate and deadly punishment, against naming the things in my presence, and Charlie had more than once been dismissed with a caution.

Little wretch! as his father hastily ejected him from the dining-room, and sent him sleepily staggering upstairs, coming crash, crash against the banisters, the last words I heard issuing from his infant lips were 'postage stamps.'

And now, this beautiful Laura Matilda had put to me the question, 'Do you collect foreign postage stamps?'

Never in all my life had I felt so guilty as at that moment. Had I taken the lives of all the sovereigns whose image is on the stamp of their respective countries, I could not have felt more justly condemned than I did when I saw Laura Matilda's soft beseeching eyes raised to mine, awaiting my reply.

In the first moments of despairing, longing at the commencement of the quadrille to find something to say to her, wild ideas, such as one finds in the 'Sorrows of Werther,' or in Miss Braddon's novels, about community of tastes and feelings, had rushed through my mind, and I felt certain that, could I but hit on the right theme, Laura Matilda and I should find ourselves one-souled; but now, how stunned I felt at Laura Matilda actually starting with

my *bête noire*. From that moment—shall I confess it?—a reaction set in in my opinions on the tabooed subject. I no longer hated stamps. Before I had had time to reply in these simple words, 'No, Miss Jones,' the revolution was gaining ground.

Then she said softly, oh! so softly, and so mournfully, 'I am very sorry!'

And so was I, very, very sorry, and though I longed to say so, I could not. My lips seemed sealed, and I could only think the matter over pensively, as we advanced in the quadrille and performed our part. And as we set to one another and then stood still: 'What could I do towards becoming one in soul with Laura Matilda on this subject?' Then I asked her very respectfully, 'Why are you sorry?'

Judging from the tempest in my own soul, I thought her reply would have been different. It chilled me slightly. 'You would be sure to have some duplicates to give away.'

Now, to those readers who are not collectors, be it known that no collector requires more than one postage stamp of each variety, and supposing he have two of one kind, he puts one in his album, and the other, the duplicate of his own, he reserves either to exchange or give away to some friend who has it not. This is what Laura Matilda meant when she spoke of duplicates; people might mistake her meaning.

I sighed deeply, and inquired—'Are you fond of stamps?'

Her reply was given with the deepest fervour.

'O yes, I love them!'

Would she but love me and not the stamps, crossed my mind, but of course not my lips, our acquaintance was too new for that; but, having taken a deep resolution, I acted on it at once.

'Shall I try and get you some?'

And she answered promptly and joyfully—'Indeed, I wish you would, but I am quite sure that by to-morrow you will have forgotten all about them, and I shall never see one. What can you get me?'

This was business-like, but I had cast business to the winds, had

made her an offer without having the wildest idea of how to set about fulfilling it, and thinking in that case I might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb, said—

'What do you most wish for?'

And, in putting this question, I put it fully, determining that if it were even necessary to go abroad myself for those she required, it should be done, rather than that Laura Matilda should be disappointed.

'I want South American, all kinds of South American, particularly Brazilian; I want Honolulu, and all kinds of Pacific Ocean ones, from those out-of-the-way places; I want some French Republics, old Indians, new Capes, obsolete Sydneys; but you need not be bringing me New Zealands, or New Indians, or those dreadful United States ones. That cauliflower head of Lincoln's makes me sick to look at it, and people *will* persist in giving it to me. I always throw it in the fire when I get it.'

I lost not a moment in entering on my card the names of the required stamps, in the intervals between this and the next occasions on which we were required to dance, and my card read oddly, supposing that the entries stood for the names of my partners. For a valse, I found I had booked an 'old Indian,' and a 'new Cape' had been promised a mazurka, while a 'Russian' had me secured for a coming galop, not to speak of a quadrille marked 'Turkey,' which might be supposed to allude remotely to the coming supper.

Laura Matilda watched with glistening eyes my entry.

'You look almost as if you intended to get them for me,' she said; 'but do not throw the card out of the window as you go home.'

Had swearing been allowable in polite and feminine circles, I should have at once made her believe, through its medium, that I was a man of my word; but that being impossible, I merely affirmed, as the Quakers say, that my future life should be devoted to the pursuit and acquisition of postage stamps. And all for Laura Matilda!

It was my happy fate to take Laura Matilda down to supper, not that I wished for any; but it was a delightful idea to know that for the next half-hour I should have nothing to do but attend to her wants.

There is a kind of young lady, very common in society, that, on being taken down to supper, and asked what she will take, invariably answers, 'Jelly;' or if anything lighter is to be had, she will choose it, say—grapes. Very young ladies act so in general, but I have often found them easily prevailed upon to eat something a little more substantial, apple tart, or even fowl and tongue.

Laura Matilda was not one of these delicately-appetised young ladies. I had no occasion to press her beyond the bounds of politeness to eat and be merry.

I had the satisfaction, nay, rather, gratification, of seeing her eat everything I recommended to her, and, when not eating, talk in the most eloquent manner. If I were struck by her charms upstairs, imagine how infatuated I became downstairs. Before we left the supper-room, she had confided to me her feelings on many subjects, and above all she informed me that she was staying at the Furnivals, and would be there for a week longer.

'So,' she added, 'I hope, Mr. Benson, you will look sharp about the postage stamps.'

I assured her I would do my best, and in the middle of my assurance a horrid creature came up, and claiming her as his partner, bore her off.

I had no further conversation with her until the party broke up; but whenever she passed me she gave me a knowing nod, which said plainer almost than words could speak it, 'Postage stamps.'

CHAPTER II.

HOW TO PROCEED?

The next morning I arrived at the office as usual, and sat down at my desk wondering how I should set about fulfilling Laura Matilda's wishes. Several of our fellows were mad on the subject, but as they

never dared to name it to me, I had no idea how they set about making a collection.

As good fortune would have it, one of the first to come in after me was young Griffin; and, considering him too slow a fellow to raise a laugh at my expense, I attacked him first:

'I say, old fellow, have you got any stamps to spare?'

'Eh!' said Griffin, scarcely believing the evidence of his own ears.

'Got any duplicates to give away?'

'Well, that's good! Have you turned collector?'

'It is not for myself; it is for another.'

'By Jove,' said Griffin, 'the world is coming to an end! but you are very welcome to any I have.'

So the good-natured fellow pulled out his pocket-book and emptied the contents on my desk.

'Now, explain them,' I said, 'for I do not know one from another.'

Griffin began, 'That is a United States, Lincoln's head, you see: that is a New Zealand, twopence. That is—'

In a word, Griffin had all the taboos, and not one of those which Laura Matilda desired. Then I asked everyone in the office I knew to be a collector; but they all believed, or affected to believe, I was laughing at them, and declined to contribute. Then I thought of Charlie, over at Uncle John's; and that very evening I went across to Birkenhead.

I found my cousin Mary (who is one of the best girls in the world) sitting in the drawing-room at her work; my aunt was not in the room, and Charlie was seated beside Mary, sorting his stamps.

As soon as I had spoken to Mary, I said to Charlie, 'Let me see your stamps, Charlie.'

In a moment Charlie had jumped from his seat and put half the length of the room between him and me.

'Thank you,' he said; 'I was not born yesterday, cousin Harry.'

'What is the matter?' I asked.

'Don't I remember? I was never to let you see a stamp again as long as I lived.'

'But I have changed my mind,' I said. 'Come, Charlie, don't be disagreeable.'

To make a long story short, I induced poor Charlie to part with the most valuable of his collection, under specious promises of splendid exchanges, and left a deposit of five shillings with the boy as an earnest of my good faith.

The reader may imagine the delight with which I recrossed to Liverpool that night, having secured such prizes as only schoolboys ever have. It is very odd how they come to make such splendid collections.

The next morning I was able to pass calmly at my desk, secure in the possession of Laura Matilda's affection, which I considered I had purchased at a cheap rate; and I waited impatiently until I could leave the office and make a call I had intended on Mrs. Furnival.

Hurrying up Church Street to catch an omnibus which was to convey me to the suburb where our chief resided, who should I meet coming down but Helen Furnival and Laura Matilda.

Laura looked charming, in the daintiest Mary Stuart bonnet imaginable. She smiled, and blushed, and was so animated, and so glad to see me, and asked so enthusiastically after the stamps. It was a moment of intense pride to me when I took out my pocket-book, and showed her an envelope sealed and addressed to herself. She took it, and thanked me, oh, so very sweetly! and I thought I had never seen her look lovelier than at that moment. It was no use thinking now of going out to Mrs. Furnival's, so I joined the young ladies, and we all walked towards Bold Street together.

'Now,' said Laura Matilda to me, as we walked up the street, 'you have been so very kind about those stamps, Mr. Benson, I think I could not do better than ask you to do something else for me.'

How my heart throbbed! how loud my pulse beat at the sound of her words!

'Oh, pray do!' I stammered out; 'pray ask me to do something else for you, Miss Jones.'

'Well,' she said, 'you must know

I am dying for a Mulready envelope, and I want you to try and get me one.'

'You are dying!' I said, in consternation; 'why you really don't look at all like it.'

'Only for an envelope, stupid,' she said, laughing; 'I did not think you were so obtuse. Helen, darling, is he joking?'

Helen did me the justice to think I was quite serious, and said so.

'I really must have a Mulready envelope,' Laura Matilda said, 'and I cannot go home without one. What is Liverpool for, if not to provide postage stamps for the provinces? The end of it is, Mr. Benson, you must get me a Mulready envelope.'

'And, may I ask,' I said, with much humility, 'what is a Mulready envelope? Is it one of any peculiar shape or make, or is it for any particular purpose?'

'Did you ever!' cried Laura Matilda; 'no, I never heard of any one who did not know what a Mulready envelope was. Of course they were not in use in our recollection, Mr. Benson; but have you never seen or heard of them?'

Again I protested utter ignorance.

'They were the first envelopes used when the penny postage came in, or some time thereabouts—I never profess to remember dates, and the order in which things happen,—what is the good? You can always find some one else who will remember them for you; and it must wear one's brains out sadly. But these envelopes had a picture all round them; and sending your letter in one of them postpaid it.'

I could not remember ever having seen one; nor did I know any one who had; nor had I the slightest idea of where to look for one. I suppose I looked rueful, for Laura Matilda began to give an animated description of the indispensable envelope.

'First,' she said, 'in the middle is Britannia, with the big, sulky-looking lion at her feet, and she is sending out handfuls of little angels with letters across the sea, to camels and Chinese with pigtails, and elephants,

and Penn and the Indians; and there is the dog, too, with the Indians, that you always see poking his nose at nothing at all, and the usual tropical tree that has no end of prodigious fruit, and a reindeer in the distance, and two girls in the corner at a love-letter (I suppose it is one), and,—oh, Mr. Benson, it is a delicious envelope! and I hope you will get me one. I should so love—I mean, I should be so much obliged to you, if you would get it,—and, oh! please get it soon, for I am going home in a week; and I should rather have a blue one than a black one,—but the black will do if you cannot get the blue. It is a ravishing envelope, Mr. Benson!

I felt my breath coming short at this description. Was ever such an envelope seen? I had my doubts, and feared Laura Matilda might be indulging in that most detestable of all amusements, quizzing.

‘If I knew where they were to be had,’ I said, in a faint voice, rather deprecatingly.

‘If I knew myself,’ said Laura Matilda, ‘I should not have asked you to get it for me. Like all great discoverers, you must search for it until you find it,—and, remember, if you do not get me one, I shall never speak to you again. So don’t expect it!’

With this terrific warning, accompanied by a threatening shake of her parasol, Miss Jones turned away and entered a shop, leaving me standing with Helen Furnival in the street.

‘Now,’ said Helen, ‘it is my turn to speak; I never attempt it when Laura is riding one of her hobbies. You will have to get the envelope. She is dreadfully in earnest about everything she takes in hand. That is, if you really value her good opinion—or, I suppose I should say, her regards,—for it seems to me that is the reward she holds out.’

‘Value her regards! That indeed I do, above everything I know on earth; and if they are to be won by a Mulready envelope, she shall have it, if I sweep land and sea for it.’

This I said in a melodramatic tone, feeling the occasion demanded

more than ordinary language. Miss Furnival laughed.

‘I am afraid sweeping the sea won’t help you; but inquiring among your friends on land may. In the mean time, have you any engagements for to-morrow evening? Mamma sent notes by the carriage down to the office, hoping the servant would find you and some of your friends still there. If you give me a verbal answer, I shall release you from answering mamma’s note; and,’ she added, laughing, ‘you will have more time to devote to the pursuit of the Mulready envelope.’

This was gratifying. Another evening with Laura Matilda! What engagement, made under no matter what circumstances, could stand before this invitation? I assured Miss Furnival I considered myself engaged from that moment; and she then dismissed me, saying they liked to buy Berlin wools without a gentleman, and she advised me to lose no time in my search.

As I turned away, I could not but ponder on the lovely enthusiasm displayed by Laura Matilda about the envelope. ‘Sweet girl,’ I said to myself, ‘of such bright material are made the minds of the great of this world. How did our Peabodys and our Brownes rise to wealth and eminence but by energy?’ And to have energy one must have enthusiasm. Laura Matilda had, indeed, looked the soul of enthusiasm as she demanded of me a promise to leave no stone unturned to procure the desired treasure. Her eyes sparkled, her mouth smiled, showing all her teeth, which, I am sorry to say, were anything but good, and she waved her parasol like the baton of a conductor at a musical performance. In a word, Laura Matilda looked even more enchanting under these circumstances than she had done the night of Mrs. Furnival’s party. I was ten times more her slave, I was her sworn knight—sworn to procure for my Dulcinea a Mulready envelope. Then from her my thoughts turned in sad comparison to myself. I was not enthusiastic about the envelope, only about Laura Matilda, and I

wondered if my dogged perseverance in this cause would stand me instead of a more brilliant quality.

Before I had half settled this point, I found myself over at Birkenhead, for I had determined on first ascertaining if Charlie had the envelope.

CHAPTER III.

HOPE.

I walked up to Hamilton Square, and found Mary at home. Charlie had not returned from school. To her I told my errand, suppressing, however, names and reasons, merely stating my need, my urgent need of a Mulready envelope.

'Charlie has not got one,' Mary said, 'nor do I know any one who has that would give it to you. I know it well; the boys bring these things to show them to me, and I have picked up a good deal of stamp jargon.'

I said, 'I wished she could instruct me a little,' for I thought it would be so pleasant to be able to talk stamps with Laura Matilda the next evening; but Mary laughed, and said, 'Stamps were a love-lesson, only to be learned by caring for them or for the collector.'

This was a random shot. I am sure Mary meant nothing by it, but I felt almost found out.

'Then I suppose you don't care enough for me, Mary, to try and get me the Mulready envelope?'

'I care enough for you,' she said, washing in a sky in a drawing she was doing, 'to set the boys inquiring among their schoolfellows. It is the best plan I know; and if you wish to enlist Charlie in your service, you had better repay those stamps you borrowed from him. You cannot hit a small boy in a tenderer spot than his stamp-book.'

'In that case I shall go away before he comes in, and take care to bring him some the next time I come.'

'When will that be?' Mary asked.

'I do not know. How soon is there a chance of you having the envelope for me?'

'I never said I would do more than inquire,' Mary said, holding her drawing at a little distance to see the effect; 'but, Harry, if you are in such haste for it, you ought to inquire in every direction for it yourself.'

'I am in great haste,' I said; 'it is dreadfully important, Mary, and I have only a week to look for it in.'

'Very well,' said Mary, quietly; 'you look as if you were going to lose your rest about it, cousin Harry.'

As she spoke, she looked up at me for a moment, and then resumed her drawing.

'That is as much as to say you won't lose your rest about it?' I said, annoyed at the calm way she took it.

She made no answer, but mixed a little of a cool grey colour, and went on putting it in.

'Do you not intend to answer me?' I said, at last, nettled I knew not at what.

'Your last remark? Certainly not.'

'Good morning,' I said, getting up. 'You would rather help some of those schoolboys than me, Mary. You used to be different.'

She laid down her brush, held out her hand, said 'Good morning,' and I went away.

I am sure I do not know why I fought with Mary, for I never had done so before; but after Laura Matilda's charming enthusiasm, Mary's calmness aggravated me. If she had not been so indifferent, I should have confided all about Laura Matilda to her; I generally did tell her of the girls I admired.

The next morning I had to screw up my courage to run the gauntlet of the office jokes, and go about inquiring seriously for the Mulready. I began with Griffin, but he wanted one for himself, and I went round them all in turn, but without success. Then came the evening of the party. Laura was dressed in pink, and looked, if possible, lovelier than she had done in blue; and she danced so gracefully, far outshining in every respect the other girls in the room. I danced seven times

running with her, and then Mrs. Furnival interfered, and requested we would both choose other partners. Very impertinent of her, I consider, for it was none of her business.

The next morning I began, as usual, inquiring in the office, but no one could give me any hope. Griffin advised me to advertise in the 'Liverpool Mercury,' and get the advertisement inserted in the place where the matrimonial advertisements always are; and Bigger, one of our fellows, drew up a copy for me, but I had not enough of courage yet to go through the jokes that this would entail on me. The advertisement, too, ran so obscurely, that the reader was puzzled whether Mulready was the advertiser, or whether he wanted me or I him, or whether the public was cautioned not to trust either of us, or whether some kind of new envelope was to be had for sale at my lodgings; and the dreadful fellow stuck up copies everywhere it was likely to escape the eyes of the principals in whose counting-house we were.

The next morning, as I was sitting at breakfast, a letter came by post for me, signed 'Hannah Cropper, New Brighton,' saying the writer had an envelope for sale, the kind she heard I had been inquiring for, and if I chose to become a purchaser, a personal interview could be had that day, &c., &c.

Here was good news. The wonder was, how she had heard of it so soon; but I felt exceedingly happy at the thoughts of concluding the business quietly down at New Brighton, without any of the fellows knowing anything about it; so I put the letter with Hannah's address in my pocket, and hurried down to the office. Two or three asked me had I got the envelope I wanted, but the majority showed no interest, so at dinner-time I avoided my companions, slipped down to the landing-stage, and took the boat down to New Brighton. It would lengthen my story too much to tell how I sought Hannah Cropper in every direction, and Hannah Cropper's house, but in vain; I returned towards evening, thoroughly tired

and annoyed. I went straight to my lodgings, and the first sight met my eye was another letter in Hannah's peculiar caligraphy.

Mrs. Cropper hoped this letter would be in time to stop me going to New Brighton, as it was Wavertree should have been in the note she before sent, but the person as wrote it made a mistake.

It was enough to put any one in a passion, but I determined, come what would, to go to Wavertree and find Hannah Cropper; and go I did; but after another day's fruitless searching I returned home, wishing Hannah neck and crop in the Mersey. By this time the Mulready envelope had become one of the standing jokes in the office, until I began to dread going in to my work; and it needed all my dreams of Laura Matilda, and the bright vision of her smiles crowning my success at last, to carry me through. I sat down next morning to breakfast with a horrid dread of what the day might bring forth in the shape of office jokes.

The morning paper was on the table, and the reader may imagine, if he or she can, for I cannot describe, my feelings when my eye fell on an advertisement on the first page of the 'Mercury,' just where I had often seen the wants of sighing Colebs depicted. Breathlessly I read—

'To Postage-stamp Collectors.

'For sale, a Mulready envelope, in good condition. Personal application necessary. Apply at No. — Prince's Park, on this day, between the hours of one and three.'

Now I had already to make my peace with Smith, our head clerk, for absenting myself on two consecutive afternoons, and here I required a third. I may as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb, I had before said, when embarking in this chase for Laura Matilda; so I said the same again, and started down to the office, feeling unwontedly light-hearted. As I had hoped, I was almost the first in, and had made my peace with Smith, and obtained permission for that day's half-holiday also, before the young men came tramping in. I never saw

Smith so good-natured as he was that day, especially when I assured him that urgent private business would prevent me returning after dinner. I answered the usual number of querists that morning about the envelope, and then we fell to work, and the Mulready was lost sight of by all but me.

At half-past two o'clock I found myself alighting from the 'bus at the gate of Prince's Park, and with the address in my hand I proceeded to find the house by the number given in the advertisement. I paused not to look at the pond, nor the

rocks, nor the rock-plants, but turning my back on St. Paul's spire, quickly found the house. Such a fine one, too! 'Well,' I said to myself, 'if I lived here, I should be very sorry to sell my Mulready envelope.' And, after all, I was not wrong in my idea. I rang the bell, and a footman in model calves opened the door. I explained my business; he listened, staring.

'Yes,' I said, 'the advertisement said between one and three o'clock.'

'I don't hunderstand,' the man said, rather insolently.

'You are dull of comprehension,



then,' I said, using a form of expression I considered suitable to the man's rank of life, and again I repeated my question.

'Young man,' he said, with an air of exceeding patronage, 'you are quite mad. You are too respectable looking, and it is too early in the day for you to be the other thing, otherwise I would call the police, and give you in charge.'

I assured him I was both sober

and sane, but he shut the door angrily, saying he gave me five minutes to go off, and assuring me 'mad people never knew when they was mad.'

Slowly and sadly I retraced my steps, and walked into town, if not richer by a Mulready envelope, at least a little wiser than I had been three days before.

It was half-past three when I reached town, and I hurried at once

to the counting-house and took my seat at my desk, trying to attract as little observation as possible, but it was in vain, my tormentors were ready.

'I say, Benson, how is Hannah Cropper?'

'When did you hear from her, Benson? If I were you I would try for her at Rock Ferry, old fellow.'

'Splendid hand she writes for an old woman,' another would say.

'Which is the shortest way of coming into town from Prince's Park?' would be another question, and then Smith must come grinning out of his office, and ask how it was I had got that private and particular business over so soon?

I was nearly frantic. When business hours were over I rushed home, divided between a desire to throw myself into the Mersey, or run off to America and enlist with the Federals; and it took hours and a fabulous number of pipes to compose my ruffled spirits. The worst part of it all was, that the day before, when on my way to the Wavertree omnibus I had met Mrs. Furnival, and in the fulness of my anticipations of success I had by her sent a message to Miss Jones that I had heard of an envelope, which I hoped to get, and that she should have it before many days were over. This was the most mortifying part of all. It is very hard to forgive oneself for having been a fool.

The next morning I had much the same persecution to undergo that I had had on the previous day: even the old porter's grim face relaxed at the sight of my disconsolate one coming in, and with affected solicitude he asked—

'Well, Mr. Benson, have you got that 'ere envelope yet?' while every one of my companions had a new jest at my expense. Again I was glad to take refuge at home; but this time there was an unexpected drop of comfort in store for me. A letter in my cousin's handwriting lay on the table.

'No fear of her,' I said with relief, as I opened it; 'she is too much of a lady to play tricks on a

fellow, and too goodhearted to hurt one's feelings.' So I read—

'DEAR HARRY,—If you have not succeeded in getting the envelope you were inquiring for, you will be glad to hear I have great hopes of being able to procure one for you. A friend of mine has had a promise of one, which she expects to receive this week, and not caring particularly about it will give it to me. By next Monday, at farthest, she will be able to send it to me, and you may count on having it by the first post that leaves this after the Mulready comes to me.

'Affectionately,

'MARY.'

'Just like Mary,' I cried out in delight; 'now my troubles are at an end. Once Mary takes up a thing she is sure to carry it through all right. Now the fellows may laugh if they like: who cares?'

But I did care, nevertheless, for the jokes at the office were much worse than they had been yet, and I lived in hourly anticipation of some other practical joke being played off upon me. My one anchor, however, was my cousin Mary. I knew I could depend on her.

My week which Laura Matilda had given me was almost gone; but with Monday before me, and Mary's word, I felt quite easy in my mind, and on Saturday afternoon I went out to pay the Furnival ladies a visit, bold as a lion, and ready to defend myself if Laura Matilda reproached me for delay.

And reproach me she did, as we walked in the shrubberies, for kind Mrs. Furnival insisted on my remaining for the rest of the day, and I was exceedingly glad to do so. As I said, Laura Matilda reproached me severely with my tardiness in fulfilling her wishes; and though I had suffered deeply in her behalf, my sufferings were not of a kind to raise me in her estimation: she might perhaps have joined in the laugh against me. I defended myself as I best could, promised the envelope for Tuesday, and told her I loved her to distraction, and had done so from the first moment I laid my eyes upon her, the night of the

party This I thought would move her, and I swore to love her for ever, and die if she did not return my affection, and a great deal more to the same purpose.

Now this was the first time I had made a declaration of love to a young lady, and my knowledge of such matters was chiefly derived from novel reading. In picturing the scene beforehand to myself, I had thought over all my favourite heroines, how they received such a declaration. One would put her hand in yours as a token; another would speak and say something most loving; while a third would perhaps say nothing but look everything; nay, I had even read of one of a more demonstrative nature than most well-trained young ladies of our own day, who flung herself right into her dear one's arms.

None of these things Laura Matilda did. She only pulled some young tender shoots of laurel from the trees as we walked, and chewed them to extract the flavour of bitter almonds from them, an amusement naughty children are very partial to.

Then I implored her to speak, to give me some hope, and tried to take her hand; but both hands were so full of laurel leaves I could not hold them comfortably, and she declined to drop the leaves as I wished. I really could get no reply from her, only at intervals she would say, as she put a fresh leaf in her mouth,

'Get me the Mulready envelope.'

And when I said she should certainly have it early next week, and began again, 'Dearest,' she would cut me short, and say, 'When you get the envelope,' until I began to understand nothing more was to be said until I got the envelope, and with this tacitly agreed upon between us we parted.

Monday came, and Tuesday, and still no envelope from Mary. I who had believed firmly in her that she would not deceive, or disappoint me. (The reader will perceive that I have omitted the description of the state of my mind on Sunday and Monday, for which see any modern sensation novel—I deal

merely with facts at this portion of my narrative.)

On Tuesday evening I had determined to go over and see what Mary was about; but when I returned home in the evening I found a note from her on the table.

'DEAR HARRY,—I have been disappointed about the envelope, but hope a few more days will bring it. Is it very urgent?

'MARY.'

To this I replied, 'It is very urgent, my dear Mary,' and rushed into a rhapsody that must have astonished my sober cousin.

Wednesday evening I could stand it no longer, and went across to Birkenhead. Mary was out spending the evening, so I left a note in her workbasket and came away. Receiving no answer from her, I went over again on Thursday night, and was so fortunate as to find Mary alone. My aunt and uncle were out dining, only Charlie was with her, and having taken the precaution of buying him some stamps in a stationer's shop during the day, I had the satisfaction of seeing him take his cap and rush out to show his acquisitions to a friend.

When I asked Mary why she had not replied to my note, I found she had never received it, not having lifted the lid of her basket that day: so I proceeded to turn out the contents in search of my note, which I had thrust far down. Instead of my own note, I first came upon another, one which had been opened and read.

'There,' Mary said, seeing what I had come upon, 'that is the last note I had from the friend who promised me the Mulready envelope. Read it.'

I opened it and read the following—

'DEAREST MARY,—I have decided on having my bridesmaids in cerise: I hope that will suit you. I am sorry again to disappoint you about the Mulready envelope. The poor idiot who is to get it has positively promised it for Wednesday. He is the greenest goose you ever saw, and it is awful fun. I shall make

Bill die laughing about him when I go down to Leicestershire.

'Yours, darling,

'LAURA MATILDA JONES.'

"I stopped half-way down the page and looked at the signature, and then feeling very faint, sat down on the nearest chair. Mary was preparing tea, and did not see me: I was glad she did not see me in my first agony. Then the pulses stood still with a vengeance. I made one tremendous effort at last, 'How did you know Miss Jones?'

'I was at school' with her, and made one of those silly compacts green geese, as she would style them, make, to be each other's bridesmaids; I do not wish to be hers, neither does mamma wish it, and she is to arrange it somehow that I need not go. I do not care for that style of girl. Laura takes it for granted I am going. She is in town buying her trousseau.

Then I made a clean breast to Mary, and told her all, and her honest indignation did me good. She was so kind as not to laugh at me, but I could see her amusement in her eyes.

'Such horrid treachery,' she said. 'I shall let her know my mind, Harry, and you may depend upon my needing no cerise trimmings. I shall write her a note: you shall see it before you go, and if mamma approves of it, it shall go to-morrow morning. Green goose, indeed! I shall show her my opinion of "awful fun."'

It was many weeks before I got over the mortification I suffered: it was only by making frequent trips to Birkenhead I could meet with consolation. The fellows in the office had got hold of as much of the story as supplied them with

laughing material, and I had a very hard time with office wit. It was an intense relief to be told one morning I was chosen to go to China; I had always been anxious for the appointment, and there was nothing to be done but provide an outfit, and say good-bye. So Mr. Furnival said; but I knew better. I had still to go over to Birkenhead, and discuss my journey with my relatives. When alone with Mary one day, I pressed her hard to come out with me, and only that I knew she was too good and true to make fun of me just then, I might have feared it from her answer, not like any of the heroines I had ever read of in fiction.

'Yes, if you will promise to get me a Mulready—'

I stifled the last word very unceremoniously before it came out of her lips, and to do her justice, she has never once alluded to the unfortunate envelope since that day.

We are not yet married, but I hope by the time the readers of 'London Society' have reached the conclusion of my tale, that we shall be. And if they will only look at the list of passengers that leave England by the overland mail, the first that leaves after reading this, they will most probably see—'For China—Mr. and Mrs. H. Benson,' and I hope they will one and all wish us *bon voyage*. I am sorry I shall have no opportunity of hearing if every one is quite satisfied with the result of my disappointment about Laura Matilda. It takes a great weight off the author's mind, when he knows that the reading world is perfectly satisfied with the matches his heroes and heroines make. I hope they are pleased with mine.



THE MYSTERY OF THE BLOODY HAND.

A New Year's Story.

CHAPTER I.

A MEMORABLE NEW YEAR'S DAY.

Dorothy to Eleanor.

DEAREST ELEANOR,

YOU have so often reminded me how rapidly the most startling facts pass from the memory of man, and I have so often thereupon promised to write down a full account of that mysterious affair in which I was providentially called upon to play so prominent a part, that it is with shame I reflect that the warning has been unheeded and the promise unfulfilled. Do not, dear friend, accuse my affection, but my engrossing duties and occupations, for this neglect, and believe that I now take advantage of my first quiet evening for many months to fulfil your wish. Betty has just brought me a cup of tea, and I have told the girl to be within call; for once a heroine is not always a heroine, dear Nell. I am full of childish terrors, and I assure you it is with no small mental effort that I bring myself to recall the terrible events of the year 1813.

Oddly enough, it was on the first day of this year that I made the acquaintance of Mr. George Manners; and I think I can do no better than begin by giving you an extract from the first page of my journal at that time.

'Jan. 1, 1813.—It is mid-day, and very fine, but it was no easy matter to be at service this morning after all good Dr. Penn's injunctions, as last night's dancing, and the long drive home, made me sleepy, and Harriet is still in bed.

'Though I am not so handsome as Harriet, and boast of no conquests, and though the gentlemen do not say the wonderfully pretty things to me that they seem to do to her, I have much enjoyed several balls since my introduction into society. But for ever first and foremost on my list of dances must be

Lady Lucy Topham's party on New Year's Eve. Let me say New Year's Day, for the latter part of the evening was the happy one to me. During the first part I danced a little and watched the others much. To sit still is mortifying, and yet I almost think the dancing was the greater penance, since I never had much to say to men of whom I know nothing: the dances seem interminable, and I am ever haunted by a vague feeling that my partner is looking out over my head for some one prettier and more lively, which is not inspiring. I must not forget a little incident, as we came up the stairs into the ball-room. With my customary awkwardness I dropped my fan, and was about to stoop for it, when some one who had been following us darted forward and presented it to me. I curtsied low, he bowed lower; our eyes met for a moment, and then he fell behind. It was by his eyes that I recognised him afterwards in the ball-room, for in the momentary glance on the stairs I had not had time to observe his prominent height and fine features. How strangely one's fancy is sometimes seized upon by a foolish wish! My modest desire last night was to dance with this Mr. George Manners, the handsomest man and best dancer of the room, to be whose partner even Harriet was proud. Though I had not a word for my second-rate partners, I fancied that I could talk to *him*. Oh, foolish heart! how I chid myself for my folly in watching his tall figure thread the dances, in fancying that I had met his eyes many times that evening, and, above all, for the throb of jealous disappointment that came with every dance when he did not do what I never soberly expected he would—ask *me*. A little before twelve I was

sitting out among the turbans, when I saw him standing at some distance, and unmistakably looking at me. A sudden horror seized me that something was wrong—my hair coming down, my dress awry—and I was not comforted by Harriet passing at this moment with—

"What! sitting out still? You should be more lively, child! Men don't like dancing with dummies."

"When her dress had whisked past me I looked up and saw him again, but at that moment he sharply turned his back on me and walked into the card-room. I was sitting still when he came out again with Mr. Topham. The music had just struck up, the couples were gathering; he was going to dance then. I looked down at my bouquet with tears in my eyes, and was trying hard to subdue my folly and to count the petals of a white camellia, when Mr. Topham's voice close by me said—

"Miss Dorothy Lascelles, may I introduce Mr. Manners to you?" and in two seconds more my hand was in his arm, and he was saying in a voice as commonplace as if the world had not turned upside down—

"I think it is Sir Roger."

"It is a minor satisfaction to me to reflect that, for once in my life, I was right. I did talk to Mr. George Manners. The first thing I said was—

"I am very much obliged to you for picking up my fan." To which he replied (if it can be called a reply)—

"I wish I had known sooner that you were Miss Lascelles' sister."

"I said, 'Did you not see her with me on the stairs?' and he answered—

"I saw no one but you."

"Which, as it is the nearest approach to a pretty speech that ever was made to me, I confide solemnly to this my fine new diary, which is to be my dearest friend and confidante this year. Why the music went so fast, and the dance was so short on this particular occasion, I never could fathom; both had just ceased, and we were still chatting, when midnight struck, deep-toned or shrill, from all the clocks in the

house; and, in the involuntary impressive pause, we could hear through the open window the muffled echo from the village church. Then Mr. Topham ran in with a huge loving-cup, and, drinking all our good healths, it was passed through the company.

When the servant brought it to me, Mr. Manners took it from him, and held it for me himself by both handles, saying—

"It is too heavy for your hands;" and I drank, he quoting in jest from Hamlet—

Nymph, in thine orisons be all my sins remembered;

Then he said, "I shall wish in silence," and paused a full minute before putting it to his lips. When the servant had taken it away, he heaved so profound a sigh that (we then being very friendly) I said—

"What is the matter?"

"Do you believe in presentiments, Miss Lascelles?" he said.

"I don't think I ever had a presentiment," I answered.

"Don't think me a fool," he said, "but I have had the most intense dread of the coming of this year. I have a presentiment (for which there is no reason) that it will bring me a huge, overwhelming misfortune: and yet I have just wished for a blessing of which I am vastly unworthy, but which, if it does come, will probably come this year, and which would make it the brightest one that I have ever seen. Be a prophet, Miss Lascelles, and tell me—which will it be?—the joy or the sorrow?"

"He gazed so intently that I had some difficulty in answering with composure—

"Perhaps both. We are taught to believe that life is chequered."

"See," he went on. "This is the beginning of the year. We are standing here safe and happy. Miss Lascelles, where shall we be when the year ends?"

"The question seemed to me faithless in a Christian, and puerile in a brave man: I did not say so; but my face may have expressed it, for he changed the subject suddenly, and could not be induced to return

to it. I danced twice with him afterwards; and when we parted I said, emphatically—

"A happy new year to you, Mr. Manners."

"He forced a smile as he answered, 'Amen!'"

"Mrs. Dallas (who kindly chaperoned us), slept all the way home; and Miss Dallas and Harriet chatted about their partners. Once only they appealed to me. What first drew my attention was Mr. Manners' name."

"Poor Mr. Manners!" Harriet said; "I am afraid I was very rude to him. He had to console himself with you, eh, Dolly?—on the principle of love me love my dog, I suppose?"

"Am I so conceited that this had never struck me? And yet—but here comes Harriet, and I must put you away, dear diary. I blush at my voluminousness. If every evening is to take up so many pages, my book will be full at Midsummer! But was not this a red-letter day?"

Well may I blush, dear Nell, to re-read this girlish nonsense. And yet it contains not the least strange part of this strange story—poor Mr. Manners' presentiment of evil. After this he called constantly, and we met him often in society; and, blinded by I know not what delusion, Harriet believed him to be devoted to herself, up to the period, as I fancy, when he asked me to be his wife. I was staying with the Tophams at the time. I believe that they had asked me there on purpose, being his friends. Ah, George! what a happy time that was! How, in the sweet days of the sweetest of summers, I laughed at your 'presentiment!' How you told me that the joy had come, and, reminding me of my own sermon on the chequered nature of life, asked if the sorrow would yet tread it down. Too soon, my love! too soon!

Nelly! forgive me this outburst. I must write more calmly. It is sad to speak ill of a sister; but surely it was cruel, that she, who had so many lovers, should grudge me my happiness; should pursue George with such unreasonable malice; should rouse the senseless

but immovable obstinacy of our poor brother against him. Oh, Eleanor! think of my position! Our father and mother dead; under the care of our only brother, who, as you know, dear Nell, was at one time feared to be a complete idiot, and had, poor boy! only so much sense as to make him sane in the eyes of the law. You know the fatal obstinacy with which he pursued an idea once instilled; the occasional fits of rage that were not less than insanity. Knowing all this, my dear, imagine what I must have suffered when angrily recalled home. I was forbidden to think of Mr. Manners again. In vain I asked for reasons. They had none, and yet a thousand to give me. When I think of the miserable stories that were raked up against him,—the misconstruction of everything he did, or said, or left undone,—my own impotent indignation, and my poor brother's senseless rage, and the insulting way in which I was watched, and taunted, and tortured,—oh, Nelly! it is agony to write. I did the only thing left to me—I gave him up, and prayed for peace. I do not say that I was right: I say that I did the best I could in a state of things that threatened to deprive me of reason.

My submission did not produce an amount of harmony in the house in any way proportionate to the price I paid for it. Harriet was obliged to keep the slanders of my lover constantly in view, to quiet the self-reproach which I think she must sometimes have experienced. As to Edmund, my obedience had somewhat satisfied him, and made way for another subject of interest which was then engrossing his mind.

A man on his estate, renting a farm close to us, who was a Quaker, and very 'strict' in his religious profession, had been for a long time grossly cheating him, relying, no doubt, on my poor brother's deficient intellect. But minds that are intellectually and in reason deficient, are often endowed with a large share of cunning and caution, especially in monetary affairs. Edmund guessed, watched, and discovered; but when the proof was in his hands,





Drawn by J. Abbot Pasquier.]

THE MYSTERY OF THE BLOODY HAND.

[See Chapter II.]

his proceedings were characteristically peculiar. He did not discharge the man, and have done with it; he retained him in his place, but seemed to take a—let me say—immense delight in exposing him to the religious circle in which he had been a star, and from which he was ignominiously expelled; and in heaping every possible annoyance and disgrace upon him that the circumstances admitted. My dear, I think I should have preferred his wrath upon myself, to being the witness of my brother's miserable exultation over the wretched man, Parker. His chief gratification lay in the thought that, exquisite as were the vexations he heaped upon him, the man was obliged to express gratitude for his master's forbearance as regarded the law.

'He said he should never forget my consideration for him till death! Hal ha!'

'My only puzzle,' I said, 'is, what can induce him to stay with you.'

And then the storm turned upon me, Eleanor.

You will ask me, my dear, how, meanwhile, had Mr. Manning taken my letter of dismissal. I know now, Nell, and you will know the mystery that then added weight to my distress. He wrote me many letters,—but I never saw one!

And now, dear friend, let me pause and gather courage to relate the terrible events of that galling, horrible—that accursed June.

CHAPTER II.

THE TERRIBLE JUNE.

It was about the middle of the month. Harriet was spending some hours with a friend, Edmund was out, and I had been left alone all day for the first time since I came home. I remember everything that happened with the utmost distinctness. I spent the day chiefly in the garden, gathering roses for pot-pourri, being disinclined for any more reasonable occupation, partly by the thundering oppressiveness of the air, partly by a vague, dull feeling of dread that made me rest-

less, and which was yet one of those phases of feeling in which it all depended on an energetic movement, one must trifle. In this mood, when the foreboded mind instinctively shrinks from its own great trouble, little things assume an extraordinary distinctness. I trod carefully on the patterns of the terrace pavement, counted the roses on the white bush by the dial (there were twenty-six), and seeing a beetle on the path, moved it to a bank at some distance. Then it crept into a hole, and such a weak, weary desire seized on me to creep after it and hide from what was coming, that—I thought it wise to go in.

As I sat in the drawing-room there was a rose still whole in my lap. I had begun to pluck off the petals, when the door-bell rang. Though I heard the voice distinctly when the door was opened, I said to you, dear Nell, that my chief desire was to get the rose pulled to pieces before I was disturbed. I had hung the last petal into my lap when the door opened and Mr. Manning came into the room.

He did not speak; he opened his arms, and I ran straight into them, weeping and wailing. The roses tumbled over me and over the dial. He talked very fast, and I did nothing but cling to him, and refuse to release the weight which his presence could not remove from my mind, while he pleaded passionately for our marriage. He said that it was the extreme of all that was unreasonable, that our first happiness should be sacrificed to the insane freak of a hardly responsible maid. He complained bitterly (though I could but smile a little) of the shocking and intolerable treatment that he had received. He had come, he said, in the first place, to secure himself of my consistency—in the second, for a powerful and final remonstrance with my brother—and, if that failed, to remind me that I should be in my next month; and in every the entreaty of the Talcotts that, as a last resource, I would come to them and be married from their house. I made up my mind, and promised; then I implored him to be careful



Drawn by J. Abbot Poguer.

THE MYSTERY OF THE BLOODY HAND.

[See Chapter II.]

his proceedings were characteristically peculiar. He did not discharge the man, and have done with it; he retained him in his place, but seemed to take a—let me say—insane delight in exposing him to the religious circle in which he had been a star, and from which he was ignominiously expelled; and in heaping every possible annoyance and disgrace upon him that the circumstances admitted. My dear, I think I should have preferred his wrath upon myself, to being the witness of my brother's miserable exultation over the wretched man, Parker. His chief gratification lay in the thought that, exquisite as were the vexations he heaped upon him, the man was obliged to express gratitude for his master's forbearance as regarded the law.

'He said he should never forget my consideration for him till death! Ha! ha!'

'My only puzzle,' I said, 'is, what can induce him to stay with you.'

And then the storm turned upon me, Eleanor.

You will ask me, my dear, how, meanwhile, had Mr. Manners taken my letter of dismissal. I know now, Nell, and so will not revive the mystery that then added weight to my distress. He wrote me many letters,—but I never saw one!

And now, dear friend, let me pause and gather courage to relate the terrible events of that sultry, horrible—that accursed June.

CHAPTER II.

THE TERRIBLE JUNE.

It was about the middle of the month. Harriet was spending some hours with a friend, Edmund was out, and I had been left alone all day for the first time since I came home. I remember everything that happened with the utmost distinctness. I spent the day chiefly in the garden, gathering roses for pot-pourri, being disinclined for any more reasonable occupation, partly by the thundery oppressiveness of the air, partly by a vague, dull feeling of dread that made me rest-

less, and which was yet one of those phases of feeling in which if life depended on an energetic movement, one must trifle. In this mood, when the foreclouded mind instinctively shrinks from its own great troubles, little things assume an extraordinary distinctness. I trode carefully in the patterns of the terrace pavement, counted the roses on the white bush by the dial (there were twenty-six), and seeing a beetle on the path, moved it to a bank at some distance. There it crept into a hole, and such a wild, weary desire seized on me to creep after it and hide from what was coming, that—I thought it wise to go in.

As I sat in the drawing-room there was a rose still whole in my lap. I had begun to pluck off the petals, when the door-bell rang. Though I heard the voice distinctly when the door was opened, I vow to you, dear Nell, that my chief desire was to get the rose pulled to pieces before I was disturbed. I had flung the last petal into my lap, when the door opened and Mr. Manners came into the room.

He did not speak; he opened his arms, and I ran straight into them, roses and all. The petals rained over us and over the floor. He talked very fast, and I did nothing but cling to him, and endure in silence the weight which his presence could not remove from my mind, while he pleaded passionately for our marriage. He said that it was the extreme of all that was unreasonable, that our lives' happiness should be sacrificed to the insane freak of a hardly responsible mind. He complained bitterly (though I could but confess justly!) of the insulting and intolerable treatment that he had received. He had come, he said, in the first place, to assure himself of my constancy—in the second, for a powerful and final remonstrance with my brother—and, if that failed, to remind me that I should be of age next month; and to convey the entreaty of the Tophams that, as a last resource, I would come to them and be married from their house, I made up my mind, and promised; then I implored him to be careful

in his interview with my brother, for my sake—to calm his own natural anger, and to remember Edmund's infirmity. He promised, but I saw that he was slightly piqued by my dwelling so much on Edmund's feelings rather than on his. Ah! Nelly, he had never seen one of the poor boy's rages.

It may have been half-past six when Mr. Manners arrived; it had just struck a quarter to nine when Edmund came in and found us together. He paused for a minute, clicking his tongue in his mouth, in a way he had when excited; and then he turned upon me, and heaped abuse on insult, loading me with accusations and reproaches. George, white with suppressed rage, called incessantly upon me to go; and at last I dared disobey no longer; but as I went I touched his arm and whispered, 'Remember! for my sake.' His intense 'I promise, my darling,' comforted me then—and afterwards, Nelly. I went into a little room that opened into the hall and waited.

In about twenty minutes the drawing-room door opened and they came out. I heard George's voice saying this or something equivalent—(afterwards I could not accurately recall the words)—

'Good night, Mr. Lascelles; I trust our next meeting may be a different one.'

The next sentences on both sides I lost. Edmund seems to have refused to shake hands with Mr. Manners. The last words I heard were George's half-laughing—

'Next time, Lascelles, I shall not ask for your hand—I shall take it.'

Then the door shut, and Edmund went into his study. An hour later he also went out, and I was left alone once more. I went back into the drawing-room; the rose leaves were fading on the floor; and on the table lay George Manners's pen-knife. It was a new one, that he had been showing to me, and had left behind him. I kissed it and put it in my pocket: then I knelt down by the chair, Nell, and wept till I prayed; and then prayed till I wept again; and then I got up and tidied the room, and got some sewing;

and, like other women, sat down with my trouble, waiting for the storm to break.

It broke at eleven o'clock that night, when two men carried the dead body of my brother into his own kitchen—foully murdered.

But when I knelt by the poor body, lying awfully still upon the table; when I kissed the face, which in death had curiously regained the appearance of reason as well as beauty; when I saw and knew that life had certainly gone till the Resurrection:—that was not all. The storm had not fully broken till I turned and saw, standing by the fire, George Manners, with his hands and coat dabbled with blood. I did not speak or scream; but a black horror seemed to settle down like mist upon me. Through it came Mr. Manners' voice (I had not looked again at him)—

'Miss Dorothy Lascelles, why do you not ask who did it?'

I gave a sharp cry, and one of the labourers who had helped to bring Edmund in, said gravely—

'Eh, Master! the less you say the better. God forgive you this night's work!'

George's hoarse voice spoke again.

'Do you hear him?' and then it faltered a little—'Dorolice, do you think this?'

It was his pet name for me, (he was an Italian scholar), and touched me inexpressibly, and a conviction seized upon me that if he had done it, he would not have dared to appeal to my affection. I tried to clear my mind that I might see the truth, and then I looked up at him. Our eyes met, and we looked at each other for a full minute, and I was content. Oh! there are times when the instinctive trust of one's heart is so far more powerful than any proofs or reasons—that faith seems a higher knowledge. I would have pledged ten thousand lives, if I had had them, on the honesty of those eyes, that had led me like a will-o'-the-wisp in the ball-room half a year ago! The new-year's dance came back on me as I stood there—my ball dress was in the drawer up stairs—and now! oh dear! was I going mad?



Drawn by Elizabeth Osborna.]

OUR WIDOWED QUEEN.

[See the Poem.]

OUR WIDOWED QUEEN.

In Memoriam, December 20th., 1883.

THEY ask me why I weep
 And sorrow as I do;
 They say my grief should sleep
 And memory slumber too.
 Who says they sleep not now?
 Doth sleep so death-like seem
 That people marvel how
 A sleeping grief may dream?
 My sorrow long ago
 In chasened sadness slept;
 And mem'ry's flow'rets grow
 Where thorns and brambles creep.
 And still the fragrant breath
 Of roses dead and gone
 Reveals that after death
 Their spirit yet lives on.
 In dreams they flower at night,
 In thoughts they bloom by day;
 They have no dread of night,
 They're proof against decay.
 I cannot, if I would,
 Those thoughts and dreams destroy;
 I would not, if I could,
 Forget their gladsome joy.
 That vision lay like a flower,
 And woe to recall
 The spot where late I stood
 I've laid dead flowers and all.
 I plead with those who've known
 The bitter hour of grief,
 That finds in every groan
 Some earnest of relief;
 Who've lived on year by year,
 And learnt the bitter truth
 That sorrow sometimes here
 Lives on in endless youth.
 Oh ye who ask me why
 I wear so sad a mien,
 And say that I should try
 To be in grief a queen,
 Alas! there is a power
 To which e'en mine must bend;
 It rules in that dark hour
 When earth-born life must end.



Drawn by Elizabeth Oakes

OUR WIDOWED QUEEN.

(See the Poem.)

OUR WIDOWED QUEEN.

In Memoriam, December 21st., m. Dec. 1871.

THEY ask me why I weep
 And sorrow as I do;
 They say my grief should sleep
 And memory slumber too.
 Who says they sleep not now?
 Doth sleep so death-like seem
 That people marvel how
 A sleeping grief may dream!

My sorrow long ago
 In chastened sadness slept;
 And mem'ry's flow'rets grow
 Where thorns and brambles crept.
 And still the fragrant breath
 Of roses dead and gone,
 Reveals that after death
 Their spirit yet lives on.

In dreams they flower at night,
 In thoughts they bloom by day;
 They have no dread of blight,
 They're proof against decay.

I cannot, if I would,
 Those thoughts and dreams destroy;
 I would not, if I could,
 Forego their phantom joy
 That makes my tears to flow,
 And sadly to recall
 The spot where here below
 I've laid dead flowers and all.

I plead with those who've known
 The bitter hour of grief;
 That finds in every groan
 Some earnest of relief;
 Who've lived on year by year,
 And learnt the bitter truth
 That sorrow sometimes here
 Lives on in endless youth.

Oh ye who ask me why
 I wear so sad a mien,
 And say that I should try
 To be in grief a queen,

Alas! there is a power
 To which e'en mine must bend;
 It rules in that dark hour
 When earth-born life must end:

For crowns and sceptres yet
Have never held a sway
Could bid the heart forget,
Or make true love decay.

And thou; beloved child,
Oh! never may thy breast
Be racked by anguish wild,
That finds no ark of rest:

A written life of years—
Where, marked on every leaf
Are spots where scalding tears
Write chronicles of grief.

And you, dear people mine,
Bear with me still, I pray.
And let your hearts incline
To mourn with me this day.

Upon your loyal love
I fain would trusting lean,
And pray that God above
Will guide your widowed queen.

F. W. B. B.

CUSTOM AS IT AFFECTS DINNER-TIME.

THERE are many social tyrannies to which people yield most complying, without even being aware that they are under a strict domination. They have been brought up in the fear of them, and have been accustomed from their birth to regard them as fixed and immoveable institutions. Through force of habit they bring their minds to regard them with that conservative attachment which makes them subserve their own personal convenience, and the comfort of their friends, to the one great object of maintaining the tyrannies in all their rigour. To inquire into the reasonableness of them, to search out their history, and to know their hidden meanings, would be fatal to them. To question is to stumble, to doubt is to fall. The institutions themselves are facts, and the origin and significance of them are matters of faith. Whole and indivisible, it behoves one to take them as they stand, to submit to them, uphold them, and be led by them; or else to cast off all allegiance, refusing to be bound

by them, and boldly standing forth as their impeacher in the face of all the people.

Of these social tyrannies there are many crying examples in London society. Certain forms and customs which are found to be healthful for preventing impertinencies at one particular stage of the society's growth, get firmly engrafted upon the parent stock, and become so much a part of the tree as to overshadow its original branches. In this way they get grotesque, awkward, and unseemly; they outlive the cause which gave them birth, and degenerate from a wholesome and convenient form into a foolish and ungainly restraint upon freedom. Forms which preserve without encroaching upon the spirit which made them, are eminently worthy of respect, and the non-observance of them by those within their reach, stamps the neglectful as unpolished and ill-bred. Thus to give the left hand instead of the right is boorish, by whomsoever it be done, not because the left hand is less honour-

able, *per se*, than the right, but because the right is the sword-hand, the hand of offence, and should be given in knightly token of peace to the giver's friend. So the ungloved hand is the unarmed hand, and should be offered for the same reason. To go counter to these customs argues an ignorance of the rules of gentle breeding, and a want of courtliness; and there is a meaning in the forms which makes them respectable. It is the same with other forms of salutation. The military 'present' of arms, both officers' and privates', is a voluntary offer to surrender the weapons. Firing loaded cannon (formerly the guns were shotted) is not a senseless act of burning a certain quantity of powder and making a noise, but an act which places the saluting side at the mercy of the saluted. Again, the conventionality which requires the use of formal prefixes to the names of people with whom one is not well acquainted, is very commendable. It furnishes a shield against intrusiveness and impertinence. It suffers people to be 'familiar, but by no means vulgar,' in their conduct towards those who are, comparatively speaking, strangers to them; and it affords a means, by its relinquishment or the reverse, for the growth of sweetest friendship, or for guarding against undesired intimacy. It is next to impossible for the most persevering 'bore' to thrust himself upon you for long if he is always kept at a distance by the persistent use of a formal address; while there is no surer sign of an acquaintance ripening into friendship, and many times into affection, than the unchecked dropping of these affixes in writing and talking. As soon as the sense of kindness within becomes too strongly marked to allow of a formal style being any longer a true measure of its degree, the formal style is let slip, and gives place to a mode of address more becoming the altered state of feeling. In this way, under the fostering shade of a wholesome custom, are indicated the knittings and bindings together of men who get to be more than brothers, and the building-up of those ten-

derer relations between man and woman which are said to last into eternity.

The use of forms in transactions between states, and in the management of public bodies, has advantages it would not be possible to do away with. Forms prevent undue crowding and improper familiarity, and are a law to those under them, of which all see the utility.

But while it is likely enough that even in public affairs there is an excess of form which sometimes acts as an incumbrance to business, it is undoubted that in private life there are many customs which are but as the corpse to the spirit which dwelt in it—effete, troublesome contrivances, which serve no good end, but are a nuisance to all brought in contact with them. The meaning is dead—the form only remains; and yet, as I have said, the conservatism of numbers insists upon the retention of these dry bones, and will not let them be buried out of our sight. Reason is not allowed to take up the question at all; the thing which has been it is that which shall be, and there shall be no new thing under the sun. This is the 'spirit in which many look upon customs. Others cling to the observance of them with the tenacity of bulldogs, simply because they have been educated under their rule; while many more decline, on the score of trouble, to resist the tyrannies whose yoke they have got accustomed to, and whose fardels they can, through habit, bear.

Among these social grievances which are to be found in some shape in most communities, I observe the following in London society:—

A custom of separating men from women in some churches. A custom of spending much time in running the length and breadth of town in order to shoot bits of card into people's letter-boxes, or to summon a servant of such people to take the cards in. A custom of asking many more folk to squeeze into reception rooms than the rooms were built to hold. A custom of maintaining expensively constructed and expensively worked benevolent societies,

by means which deprive the revenues raised of the title of alms. A custom of publishing lists of subscriptions to charities, and of reading them out at a public dinner, with the names of the donors and the amount given, whereby not only is the donor's left hand accurately informed of what his right hand is doing, but the donor's neighbours are compelled, under pain of social tabooing, to tell their left hands what Mr. —'s right hand has done, and to propose that, rather than bring down upon themselves the sneers of the charitable, their right hands shall dive into their pockets too, and bring forth a like sum. A custom which gives all young ladies an *ex-officio* title to sing at the piano, although they may have no song-notes in them; and, correlative with this, a custom which allows of the agility and muscularity of young children to be shown off to the personal discomfort and inconvenience of visitors at their parents' houses.

Several of these have been touched upon at different times, and will doubtless be handled many times more. They are all social grievances, of which it is not unfair to complain, so long as no satisfactory reason can be given why they should be suffered to exist. It is no sufficient answer to an indignant Briton who asks the sleek verger why he should not offer his prayers side by side with his wife, to tell him that it was the practice of the church, in such and such a century, to separate the men from the women. Nor is it any good plea for the law which demands the surrender in person of a printed card to the flunkey of a house where one has been a guest a few days before, to urge that, at a certain epoch, people who had been entertained were wont to make personal inquiry—and mean it too—after the health of their entertainers of a few days before. When that kindly custom sprang up the relation between inviter and invited was vastly different from that which subsists between the crowder and the crowded in a modern 'At Home.' The nature of the hospitality suggested the advisability of

after-inquiries, and the heartiness of it made the duty of inquiring pleasant.

It is not my intention, however, just now to dwell upon any one of these grievances, nor, indeed, to make out a case against any real grievance at all. I am merely proposing, to speak of a few facts which have come under my notice in connection with custom as it affects dinner, and with the management which has the ordering and arranging of it. These facts, taken in the lump, do not make up a good cause of complaint; first, because they are not of general application; and, second, because they are capable of being easily borne, if they do not admit of correction; and yet they are capable of being worked up into one of the worst kinds of domestic oppression possible. Therefore I set myself to draw attention to them in the hope of securing that prevention which is better than cure.

Now, concerning dinners: it does not appear that, in the olden time, the meal which we call dinner was considered of much account, that is to say, it was considered only as the means of doing away with the cravings of hunger. Men who rose several hours earlier than their descendants are wont to do, who were about their work or their sport long before our breakfast-time, felt the warnings of hunger acute within them at a time of day when we think of taking a biscuit and glass of sherry. They had done a great amount of work and needed substantial refreshment; they had taken so much out of their systems that it became matter of necessity to restore them long before the natural hours of labour were gone, and accordingly they ate and drank like hungry men, and were satisfied.

'Lever à cinq, dîner à neuf,
Souper à cinq, concher à neuf,
Fait vivre d'une tonante et neuf.'

But with the satisfaction of the animal craving for food their enjoyment of the meal was small. They had more work to do, or, at all events, more of the daylight to get rid of. They could not linger at the dinner-table; they must again be up and doing, though the

infirmity of nature demanded, and the unhurried character of their employments allowed, of a liberal space out of the centre of the day for the office of dining.

When the Good Knight Bayard gave a grand tournament and jousting-match, and entertained the lords and ladies of the country round, the day's sports were divided into those before and after dinner, which was eaten at 1 P.M., and not stayed over, lest it should interfere with the second part of the programme.

And this was not a departure from the general rule, excepting, perhaps, that 1 o'clock was a little late, the custom being to dine at noon, or even earlier. Supper was served at 6 or 7, and more answered to our modern dinner than did their mid-day meal. It was a heavy affair, and frequently a riotous one.

The hard work of the day being over, men gave themselves to the pleasures of the table without reserve. They ate, they drank, and were merry. They told their stories, quarrelled over them, and got friendly again in the course of the long sitting. There was no more tilting to be done, no more game to be hunted, no more business to be looked after. To drive dull care away was all they had to do, and they did it. Their dinner was a necessity called out by the circumstances of their lives. It had no pretension to be what a modern dinner is—a mental relaxation as well as a physical refreshment. Their suppers were the meals of tired men at the fag end of the day, devoured rather than eaten, and rarely accompanied by that mental pleasure which is one of the chief characteristics of a modern dinner, and which takes it out of the category of mere feeding.

* Thei cry "Fyl the bowies!
Bonus eet liquor, hic manemus!"
For alle Chrystone sowlyes,
Dem durant vass bibences!"

This was a jolly song, surely never composed for a midday meal. It savours of revelry by night, and has a smack of heartiness about it quite refreshing to see. It was written in the time of Richard II., and its burden shows the style of entertain-

ment at which it must have been sung—a sort of entertainment, I take it, far from uncommon, and not an unfair sample of the general run of heavy suppers of the period. It might have been the very song sung by the Lord Abbot of St. Nicholas' Monastery, what time 'the daughter of old Plantagenet's line' came to sup with him; when the saint himself, according to Mr. Barham's narrative, banged at the gate, and put an end to the convivialities of the evening with his flask of holy water and his sandal'd foot, which latter we are told, and are bound to believe,

'Flew up with a terrible thwack:
And caught the foul demon about the spot
Where the tail joins on to the "small" of the back.'

But it can scarcely be taken as expressive of the spirit which pervades a dinner party in a modern gentleman's house.

As time rolled on and men got to know more, and to love the attrition of mind with mind, which makes the sparks of wit to fly, dinner became a medium for the interchange of free thought between man and man; the occasion, and in some degree the cause, of the exhibition of whatever was genial in the diners. The body was at rest, and its members were renewed by feeding; there were no calls of the body upon the mind to distract it. The impoverishment of brain which goes on while fasting, was stopped; the case in which the mind is enshrined being fortified, the mind itself could take its ease, and could afford to appear, not only in its pristine strength, but could borrow somewhat from the spirits of its animal mate, in order to deck itself with more than natural brilliancy. Prudence and application may do their work on an empty stomach, and do it better than if they had freely dined; but geniality, generosity, all the impulses, and though it may appear strange, deep thought, cannot make a good show unless backed up by a good physical foundation. Dr. Johnson after eating his leg of mutton and swallowing his seas of tea, was a more natural man than he was before he had taken them.

His strong pangs of hunger must have preyed distressingly on his mind and worried it. He rose from his meal a giant refreshed.

As the light of knowledge gradually dawned on the minds of men, dinner became less of a sensual affair and more of an æsthetic institution. It got to be a feast of reason as well as of meats, and a point in the day to which men might look forward without accusing themselves of greed, for the enjoyment of great mental pleasure as well as bodily recreation. And so they put off till the after part of the day, when their work should be done, this great feast. They stayed the suggestions of hunger, which came to them in their busy time, by slender but sufficient means, reserving the great act of thorough restoration till such time as their minds could participate in the enjoyment of it. The duration of their daily labour was the standard by which they fixed their dinner hour. The time when, their work being done, they could abandon themselves to the real pleasures of the table, was the time appointed for winding up the machinery of the human frame. And so Sir Joshua Reynolds dined at five, waiting neither for peer nor commoner. His work and that of his guests was by that time laid aside, and he could afford to give the remainder of the day to that delightful intercourse with the men of his set which has been spoken of to us by Mr. Forster, and which makes Leicester Square still respectable in spite of 'entertainment,' 'shows,' and 'exhibition' noises, to which Sir Joshua would now turn his deaf ear in vain.

And now that the habits of more modern business and life require a longer draw upon the afternoon time of men, dinner hour, ascertained by the standards I have ventured to lay down, is also of necessity deferred to a later time. For one Londoner, who, in Reynolds' time, lived away from his business, there are now five hundred who have to get to a home some miles distant from it, and to consume an amount of time, ranging from three quarters of an hour to an hour and a half, in

getting thither. Then as people begin their daily business later than they did, so they leave off later. This, and their residence in suburbs or in distant parts of the city, conspire to render their dinner hour a proportionately late one. It is a wonderful spur to the weary body, required to go at some stiff work towards the end of the day, to remember that at a certain time, known beforehand, its turn will come, and that it will be able to pick up again the loss of power which the extra spurt has caused it to suffer; to awaken to a sense of its own importance; to enjoy the gladsome influence of pleasant companions; and casting off altogether the slough of business, to bandy about the free thoughts of the moment in unshackled words; to offer and to hear the jest which is within the limits of becoming mirth.

Lucky indeed is the man who can do this, and who can shape his daily course for so pleasant a haven. Happy he who has the house to go to, and the means to provide this genial pleasure. There are very many such, and it is of them I wish to write. At present I am not concerned with those whose round of work is never ending as a wheel,—who toil from early morn till late at night, and who scarcely know what it is not to be 'going about their business.' These can have few delights apart from such as they may find in their work, and can only realize in a faint way, through the medium of suppers, those pleasures of dining whereof I speak. They are to be seen at such times as they can snatch from their occupations, crowding into dining-rooms and eating-houses, steamy with gravy, and redolent of baked meats. They satisfy the cravings of hunger in much the same fashion that a pack of unfed hounds rend the carcass of a beheaded and brushless fox thrown to them by the huntsman. There are bustle, noise, and lack of space, and there are all those disagreeables of time, place, and strange company with which no dinner can be had with real satisfaction to the diner.

The incongruities, too, of the

system, are glaring and repellent. That the man opposite to you, who have reached the cheese-stage of your meal, should be commencing an attack upon a joint from which you have already fed, is of itself a circumstance arguing a want of sympathy between you which precludes the notion of anything like sociability. You, who are satisfied in your stomach, could not possibly re-enter into praises of the food which satisfied you; nor could the undined man share with you the appreciation you may have for any matters beyond that in which he is immediately interested. Conscious of this want of sympathy, you refrain from conversation, you scramble over your meal as over any other business act of the day, and you quit the 'dining-rooms' as soon as may be, with a sense of relief at having made your sacrifice to the mighty god of hunger. You go back to your labour without having enjoyed yourself, and you are dead to the meaning of the little, understood expression 'pleasures of the table.'

I cannot but think such a system tends to debase manners, which are not exercised to advantage in a selfish rush after food; and that those who are forced to abide under it are cut off from much that tends to lighten the burden of life; that they are apt to become ill-mannered and coarse simply through want of counteracting influences.

But there are many who dine at taverns and in dining-rooms who do so, not out of choice, but out of deference to a custom which assumes the necessity. Many of them have comfortable homes and the means to supply that which I suggest would be good as well as pleasant for them; but they are prevented by causes really within their own control, from availing themselves of either for the purpose of dining. They can get home, their work done, within a reasonable time for dinner, and yet they resort to these feeding places.

They have married wives who, having been accustomed all their lives to dine at two, or some such odd hour, and being ignorant of

what dinner really is, refuse obstinately to postpone the capital meal of the day; or they raise so many obstacles in the way of doing so that it amounts to a refusal, rather, to share it with their husbands. The husbands, therefore, resort to these places I speak of, to a club (hateful place the wives call it), to the hall of their inn of court, or some other extra-domestic dining-place. They are the losers of so much home influence, and the wives are gainers of little save the reputation of adhesiveness to a life-long custom.

Again, there are some folk who, from the time of their marriage, always conceded this point, at least in theory, and fixed a certain time, say 5:30 P.M., as the hour for a greasy chin. And so long as they lived in the street adjoining, or in the same house with, the offices where the husband worked, that time perhaps did well enough. But when they removed to Verandah Lodge, several miles away, and when said husband's work increased in nearly the same ratio as his family, requiring closer and longer attention, that same hour of 5:30 became an inconvenient one—one that the husband could not truly keep for three consecutive days. Yet the wife finds numerous reasons why it should not be changed. They have always dined at that time; the servants grumble at having to clean away and wash up after such an hour; the hour would do very well if Mr. — would only make a point of getting home in proper time, &c., &c. Mr. — is not able to get home regularly to his darling wife at that time, and when he does, he is so much fatigued with the effort, and so much displeased with the cause of it, that it is more than likely he will devour his dinner in a cannibal way, without a spark of amiability, and will set himself down afterwards in dudgeon to his newspaper, or fall asleep like a gorged boa constrictor, in the most unsociable manner possible, to wake up again at tea-time with headache and indigestion. All the amenities of dinner have been sacrificed, and there has been added a

loss of kindness, which might have been avoided but for the shock which the wife's organ of adhesiveness might have suffered by doing away with a worn-out and inconvenient custom.

The son, in such a household, will probably not be bound by the rule of the house, but will, if he have the means, stay out and lose the benefit of home society; or, not having the means, he will take his own time about coming in, and will probably succeed in getting within reach of a sort of home-influence he would be better without.

The hour for commons in the inns of court, 5 P.M., was doubtless fixed at a time when more of the commoners resided in their respective inns than do so at present, and it has been continued down to this time partly out of regard to habit, and partly, perhaps, because that hour allows of men quitting the courts, in which they have been engaged, and getting to dinner as soon as the most physically hard work of their day is over. It also allows of their afterwards engaging in the reconsideration of points discussed, or consideration of points to be argued, which belong to the busy lawyer's lot, without driving him too far into the night before his labour shall have ceased. In fact, without reference to custom, it is found to be the most convenient hour for those who use the hall. And this, after all, is the true canon for dinner hours. The domestic happiness is the supreme law in such cases. If one time does not suit, another ought to be pitched on, and nothing ought to be done simply because it has been done. Such conservatism becomes a curse, and should be scouted by all legitimate means.

It is because I have observed a somewhat fatuous sticking to a practice whereof the principle has been long dead, in connection with one of the most important of domestic institutions, that I have endeavoured to show some of the advantages of the family dinner over the isolated feed, and to urge upon wives of London society the advisability of yielding a point or so in

the economy of their households; in order, not only that they may do a substantial benefit to those they are concerned about, but also win for themselves the fame and the pleasure of being truly wise in their generation.

And, ladies, when once you have succeeded in breaking through the habit of solitary feeding; when you have braved the stubborn resistance of that powerful community below stairs, of which you naturally stand so much in awe; when you have found out by experience, that a dinner eaten at 7 P.M., need make no further inroad on your housekeeping money than one eaten at 2 P.M.; when you have once enjoyed the pleasure of habitually dining with those whom daily work necessarily cuts off from sharing with you many of the other amenities of life; when you have once realized the satisfaction derivable by yourselves from the change of system; you will never go back to the old way. Your husbands no longer ravening up their food in haste, and with their loins girt like Jews at Passover, are no longer so subject to those horrible fits of dyspepsia, which such feeding is likely to induce; and of the effect of which upon the sweetest tempered of husbands, you, dear ladies, are not perhaps unaware.

It was quaintly said by an old divine that a man who had a bad digestion could with difficulty be a good Christian. Though one might be inclined to marvel at the statement, and perhaps to except to it in its absolute form, he could not fail to acknowledge that much truth was wrapped up in it. It would be unreasonable to look for ecstasy in a man whose liver was perpetually out of order. It could hardly be expected of him that he should be touched by pathos; be susceptible to a lively wit; or exhibit any of the more delicate qualities which an unbilious man might fairly be supposed to possess. You are likely to find him hasty of temper, keenly alive to small irritabilities, crabbed of speech, unamiable of manners. With all these qualities he is quite as likely to curse as to bless; and

the idea of abstract devotion is entirely out of the question.

Can you fancy a man endeavouring to lift his mind above the mundane level when he feels between his shoulder-blades a weight heavy enough to bear Hercules himself to the ground; when his breath gets 'caught,' as he tries to expire it; when his head is swimming, and his eyes are dizzy? Can such a man succeed in his attempt? I trow not. I hold the saint A. 1. of the calendar, who lived austere, rubbing his body daily with the coarsest of rough bricks; wearing uncomfortable under-clothing, never changed or washed; thrashing himself with wire whips to within an inch of his life, and within (let us hope) less than that distance of the lives dependent on him:—I hold him to be a mere fool for merits, as compared with the man who continues in a godly frame despite a plaguy liver.

And if what the divine said of things holy be true, as I think it is, surely, ladies, in domestic matters, your ill-livered husbands must give you endless trouble. Your house-keeping books must be rudely spoken of; your powers of management must frequently be disparaged; your moderate indulgence in things necessary to your position must often be decried as extravagance; you have to bear in many ways, and all unpleasant, the truly lamentable consequences of impaired digestion in your spouses. What an interest you have in trying at reformation! Believe me, these ugly traits are abnormal; they did not belong to him who some years back was wont to be so loth to leave you, so very glad to be with you; who devoted himself, with such utter want of reservation, to the task—not so difficult, perhaps, as he then thought—of winning you for his wife; who has loved you faithfully ever since the happily anxious moment when he told you he would do so. They did not belong to him then, and need not belong to him now. Of course I do not mean to say that all men who dine apart, and from home, must of necessity get indigestion. Am not I fellow to several who could digest as many tenpenny nails

as an ostrich? I know them to be strange feeders, foraging here to-day at 3 P.M. and dining there to-morrow at 8. Nothing could resist—no amount of irregularity as to time could lessen, their powers of digestion and assimilation. But they are exceptions to the general run, and who knows what change time may work even in them?

Nor do I mean to say that other causes than snatched meals have not conspired to change the quondam healthiness of your husbands' tempers. Crosses in business, baffled ambition, the too steady increase of charges, the unkindness of those to whom they have been as friends, may have done their little part towards sobering, if not souring, their dispositions. But this scrambling dinner has much to answer for. Hark to Mr. de Quincey on the subject. He says in his most witty essay on 'The Casuistry of Roman Meals:' 'Were it not for the soft relief of a 6 o'clock dinner, the gentle demeanour succeeding to the boisterous hubbub of the day, the soft glowing lights, the wine, the intellectual conversation,—life in London is now come to such a pass that in two years all nerves would sink before it. But for this periodical reaction, the modern business which draws so cruelly on the brain, and so little on the hands, would overthrow that organ in all but those of coarse organization. Dinner it is—meaning by dinner the whole complexity of attendant circumstances—which saves the modern brain-working man from going mad.'

Mr. Erasmus Wilson, in his interesting treatise on a Healthy Skin, has a capital chapter on the influence of diet; and it is highly satisfactory to me, who am advocating late dinners on the score of comfort, to find myself backed by so eminent a man, writing in the interests of health. He shows that by getting breakfast at 8 or 9, a good luncheon at 1 or 2 (with a cup of tea or coffee as an antacid, a couple of hours afterwards), and dinner at 6 or 7, an interval of four hours certain is left between each meal, to allow of the act of digestion and the subsequent rest of the stomach, and that this

interval is wanted. Digestion claims between two to three hours for itself, and the stomach gets the remaining space for repose—an amount of time scarcely too great, considering what labour 'that patient drudge' has to get through. Mr. Wilson exhorts his readers to refrain from giving the stomach new work while it is yet employed in getting rid of the old; or while it is picking up strength for further efforts. 'Tease it not, fret it not, if you would keep it in good-humour; and without its good-humour alas for yours!'

Elsewhere he says: 'The lunch of fashion is a light and commendable dinner: the dinner of fashion is an early and moderate supper;' a terse and truthful statement of fact which it would be well to bear in mind.

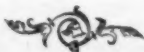
While the dinner hour should be fixed, as I have ventured to submit, in accordance with the standard of convenience, it seems that the habits of most moderns point to 7 P.M. as the proper general hour for the meal. Most people have struck work an hour before that. They have leisure to divest themselves of the thoughts as well as the clothes in which they have trudged about—to doff the 'shop' with the suit they served in, and to don humanity with their 'decent black.' They can afford, unless they be overworked lawyers, or doctors, never out of harness, to give the rest of the day to other than matters of gain.

This matter of the 'decent black' is a great matter. I knew a man who could not (*qui ne savait*) sit down to dinner unless he were in a dress suit. If he had to dine alone, it made no difference. I have surprised him, or rather I have surprised myself, walking unexpected into his house, to find him seated at table, alone, in full evening dress. He was not giving a dinner party to himself, nor—for he was a simple man—was he desirous of paying himself any extravagant compliment. He simply felt that to spend his leisure time, his hours of relaxation, in the same

dress in which he had toiled all day, savoured of the incongruous. It was to him as if 43½, Jute Street, where he daily faced his opponents in the battle of life, had invaded the sacred privacy of his home, where none but his friends, his *participes curarum*, might be.

It makes nothing that my friend was an oil merchant, whose work-day boots and clothes reeked of the tuns he bought and sold to such good account, to that extent that for him to remain in them must have banished every one from his presence. The principle on which he acted is of general application. The working clothes identify the wearer, at least to himself, with the set of workers amongst whom he takes rank; the evening dress merges him in mankind generally—takes him out of the *species* and turns him into the *genus*. My friend, whose talk from 9:15 A.M. till 5:30 P.M., was of oils and spices, of cargoes of pimento, of ships full of rice, never once spoke of them when his oil and spice dress was removed for the day. With his evening clothes came thoughts and conversation less confined. Artists and authors, traders and soldiers, lawyers and doctors, met at his table without learning, from their host's talk, whether he lived by this trade, or that profession, or guessing by what means he contrived to pay for the hospitable plenty before them.

Much more could be said, which the limits of space require should be left unsaid, on the subject of dinner time. But sufficient ground has perhaps been shown on the score of comfort, health, and kindness, of geniality, and family influence, on which to lay an appeal to those who dine at hours when the supports of the family cannot be with them, begging them for their own sakes, and for the sakes of those dear to them, to try the experiment of changing the venue of the meats to 7 P.M.



WHIST.

By 'CAVENDISH.'

THE interest and excitement aroused by games may depend entirely on chance, as at rouge et noir or blind hookey; or it may result almost entirely from the exercise of skill, as at chess and billiards; or it may centre in a combination of the two, as at whist and cricket.

There are, then, three classes of games, viz., games of chance, games of skill, and mixed games.

Games of chance, that is, games in which chance is almost the sole exciting element, have a most objectionable feature in this, that they are wanting in interest unless played for money. The amusement they afford is essentially connected with the sum depending on the result. They are, in fact, mere excuses for gambling. For this reason they are very properly tabooed in all respectable clubs. The time when, perhaps, they are least hurtful is when they are employed to keep a mixed party of adults and children amused. For then, without a round game, it is often difficult to make the evening pass off pleasantly. And be it observed, it is just at such meetings that money is not played for. The stakes are probably bon-bons; the less fortunate of the youngsters have their stock of counters gratuitously replenished by the grown-up winners, and the effect is that all the small fry win, and go home with their pockets full of sugar-plums.

Games of skill, or rather games in which skill very much preponderates (for there is no such thing as a game of pure skill), are open to an objection opposite to that which attaches to games of chance. Games of skill are apt to excite too much interest.

To play well at them is too hard work. It is making a toil of a pleasure. We resort to games as a relief, when we have already experienced enough—perhaps more than enough—brain excitement. Under these circumstances, we do not desire severe mental exertion, but rather

repose of mind. Repose is not promoted by engaging in a contest of pure skill. Hence the point of the remark by a recent writer on games at cards, that to follow chess, as an amusement, is to jump out of the frying-pan into the fire. Chess, if well played, is certainly no relaxation; and in this sense it ought not to be regarded as a game at all. Indeed, it is not a game among first-rate performers; it is the business of their lives. Chess is their real work, ordinary engagements are their relief.

Since games of chance excite too little, and games of skill too much interest, we must look for the *juste milieu*, in mixed games, in games where skill and chance both freely enter. The entry of chance not only diminishes the labour, but it at the same time increases the interest of games, by varying the faculties of the mind, which the play calls into operation. Thus, a hand at whist presents us at its commencement with a problem of nearly pure chance; towards its close (among good players), with one of nearly pure skill; and intermediately with ever-varying gradations between the two. The composition of the ancient Indian game of chess was very similar to that of whist. It was played by four persons with four suits or sets of men, variously coloured; and the moves were determined by casts with dice, thus rendering it a mixed game.

It is easy to show that whist is free from the objections which appertain to unmixed games. On the one hand, it does not demand severe or unceasing application in order to excel in it; there is no need to devote a life to the acquisition of its openings. Nor, on the other hand, does it require the stimulus of gambling. It has been truly remarked that 'the demon of gambling shrinks abashed before the good genius of whist, and feels his spirit rebuked, as it is said Mark Anthony's was by

Caesar.' The interest attaching to the game for its own sake is such that the domestic rubber for 'love' or for 'heads' is looked forward to during the long winter evenings as a fertile source of enjoyable recreation.

Our illustration represents such a rubber. The guests, all intimate friends, have assembled for what is called a 'quiet' evening. In various parts of the room we behold groups of visitors engaged in the usual amenities of after-dinner existence, some dancing, some whispering soft nothings, some gay, some serious. We particularly envy the tall officer to the right, who is so fortunate as to be encircled by three of the prettiest girls in the room. Look at the quartette. The young lady, who has tied on her head with a neck-ribbon, in accordance with the prevailing custom, has evidently made some smart repartee, which the other two girls are enjoying immensely, to the momentary discomfiture of young Heavy. In the foreground is another quartette, engaged at whist. This hand decides the rubber; and an interesting hand it is, if we may judge from the wrapt countenances of the on-lookers. The count (whom we strongly suspect of having betted an extra half-crown on the rubber) has led a puzzler. The second hand, an experienced Portlander, who nevertheless condescends in private to indulge in 'silver threepennies,' is in doubt whether to trump or not. The previous play of the hand does not afford him any positive indication of the course he should pursue. The count is perfectly happy. He waits quietly with the tenace in trumps in his hand, and whether our club friend trumps or not, is sure to win the game. The lady, who plays a capital rubber, sees, from the satisfied air of her partner, that all is right, and she therefore points, rather knowingly, to the card on the table. As for old Slow-coach opposite, he has not the slightest idea that the game is in danger. He is not what is called a regular whist player. He only 'took a hand' to make up the table. Whist is torture to him. He frowns

and screws up his face, and will be glad when the rubber is over.

When a stake is played for at private parties, the points are invariably fixed so low that the idea of gain, which is the essential feature of gambling, never enters the minds of the combatants. It may be asked, Why, then, play for any stake at all? There is an answer which is obvious as soon as it is stated. The use of a stake is to define the interest felt in the game. The difference between playing for a stake or for none, is just that of taking a walk with or without an object. Be the object ever so trifling, it much increases, by a sort of mental catalysis, the interest afforded by the occupation.

Nevertheless, it is sometimes urged as an objection against whist, that it is a card game. Cards, and therefore whist, in the minds of many excellent persons, are associated with all sorts of shady doings, late hours, gambling, swindling, and even suicide. This is an association of ideas, and nothing more. The wickedness charged on cards generally, should properly be confined, as has been explained, to games, whether of cards or not, the exciting element of which is chance. It is not fair to visit the sins of dissolute nephews and cousins, nobody knows how many times removed, upon the virtuous head of the family. A recent champion of chess, comparing it to whist, alleges that all the kith and kin of the latter, including of course its very distant relations Patience and Beat-the-knave-out-of-doors, are disreputable. He twits it with want of prestige, and contrasts its antecedents unfavourably with those of chess. As Will Wimble was wont to remark, 'There is a great deal to be said on both sides.' Whist certainly cannot boast the lineage of chess. But, among civilized beings, it is admitted that the simple accident of birth should be no bar to social distinction. On the contrary, the plebeian, who has worked his way up from the ranks, is all the more respected on that very account. It is the glory of whist that it has broken through the ties of caste, and that it owes its present position, as the king of card





"Ben & Wally" by "Carroll" (1904)

Drawn by F. H. Oakes (1904)

and political cartoon by F. H. Oakes (1904)

gam
mer
biog

lish
and
aces
not
by a
from
gam
All
chile
aper
ciata
anti
wer
gam
sedu
163
tion
to '
less
this
of w
ever
que
than
reco
Cou
Mr.
and
sou
in-d
amu
two
him
thei
(wh
was
and
obli
son.
Intr
of th
the
Que
shar
adv
in 1
he e
hon
whe
hear
hou
Gam
167
but
that

games, entirely to its intrinsic merits, as will appear on tracing the biography of the game.

Whist is unquestionably of English origin, though as to the time and place of its birth we do not possess any precise evidence. Whist is not mentioned by Shakespeare, nor by any writer of the Elizabethan era, from which we may infer that the game was then scarcely in existence. All that we know about the extreme childhood of whist is, that it was spent in the servants' hall. Its associates there, we are informed on the authority of Daines Barrington, were 'put' and 'all-fours.' The game seems soon to have manifested seductive powers, for as early as 1630 Taylor, the Water Poet, mentions whist as inducing the prodigal to 'fling his money free with carelessness.' We cannot deny that at this period the character and friends of whist were decidedly low. Whist even appears in a lock-up in the questionable company of Mr. Jonathan Wild. The great Fielding records that when the ingenious Count la Ruse was domiciled with Mr. Geoffrey Snap (who enjoyed office under the sheriffs of London and Middlesex), his countship sought to beguile the tedium of his in-door existence by recourse to the amusements of the day. Mr. Snap's two daughters benevolently aided him, and chose Wild to make up their parties. Whisk and swabbers (which is only whist under an alias), was then (1682) greatly in vogue, and the ladies were consequently obliged to look out for a fourth person. In the 'Memoirs of the Lives, Intrigues, and Comical Adventures of the most Famous Gamesters' from the time of Charles II. to that of Queen Anne, we come across a sharper named Johnson, whose last adventure was that he was hanged in 1690. Of him it is written that he excelled in the art of 'securing' honours for himself and partner when playing at whist. We next hear of whist frequenting public-houses in the City. 'The Compleat Gamester,' originally published in 1674, does not mention whist at all; but in later editions we are told that whist was a tavern game, and

that sharpeners generally took care to put about the bottle before business began. For all this, whist never accommodated itself easily to the designs of card legs. It never took to them kindly, but, like Oliver Twist, it was the victim of circumstances and of its own inexperience. Whist was more sinned against than sinning. Accordingly it contrived, after a time, to escape from its tavern acquaintances; and early in the eighteenth century, though not as yet fashionable, it had, at least, become respectable. Its principal friends at this epoch were country squires and country parsons. In the 'Beaux Stratagem,' by Farquhar (1707), Squire Sullen is said to be fond of whist, and Mrs. Sullen, who was a fine lady from London, refers to her husband's predilection in terms which imply that whist was then classed with rural rather than with west-end accomplishments. Pope also, about this time (1715), alludes to whist in conjunction with the squirearchy; and Swift, in his 'Essay on the Fates of Clergymen' (1728), says that the clergy occasionally indulged in the society of whist. This patronage does not seem to have been equal to the task of altogether retrieving whist from the character of vulgarity. Better days, however, were in store for it. About this time 'The Compleat Gamester' became amalgamated with 'The Court Gamester,' and whist was admitted into the first, the courtly division of the work, in company with 'ombre, quadrille, quintille, picquet, and the royal game of chess.' About 1730, a party of gentlemen, of whom the first Lord Folkestone was one, frequented the Crown coffee-house in Bedford Row, and there introduced whist, studied the game, and, it is believed, discovered some of its principles.*

In 1743, whist was adopted by Edmond Hoyle, who is to this day called the father of the game. Under his auspices, whist made the acquaintance of all the rank and fashion of England, and travelled

* They laid down the following rules; lead from the strong suit; study your partner's hand; and attend to the score.

across the Channel during the Anglo-mania which prevailed in France in the latter part of the eighteenth century. The Baron de V—— says, 'It was even represented at Versailles, but I cannot affirm whether it was by the English ambassador in person.' The remainder of the career of whist is well known. It was welcomed to all the chocolate-houses, clubs, and fashionable assemblies. It became the lion of the day. It was talked about and written about. Once really known, it was esteemed a universal favourite, admired and respected by all; and in spite of a little contretemps with the premier baron of England, some thirty years back, it has retained its ascendancy until now.

Edmond Hoyle published his 'Short Treatise on the Game of Whist' anonymously in 1743. It appeared just in the nick of time, when card-playing was the rage, and when whist was rapidly rising into repute. It ran through many editions, and was a lucky hit for both author and publisher. Hoyle, in his most sanguine mood, could scarcely have imagined the success which awaited his modest but invaluable work. He could hardly have expected to be ranked among English classics, and to become indispensable to every well-furnished library. He could never have hoped to be sung by the poets, nor for whist and Hoyle to be coupled with Troy and Homer: yet no less a bard than Byron has declared that—

'Troy owes to Homer what whist owes to Hoyle.'

Hoyle was an authority, or rather *the* authority, from the moment of his appearance; and his laws remained the authority until the year 1864. That year has given birth to a new club code, which, however, scarcely alters any of Hoyle's laws, but adds the traditional laws that have accumulated since his day.*

Hoyle did much more than give a printed existence to the laws of whist. He applied mathematics to

games, and especially to the game of whist, and so raised it to the dignity of a scientific game.

'By his enlightened efforts whist became
A sober, serious, scientific game;
To his unwearied pains, while here below,
The great, th' important privilege we owe,
That random strokes disgrace our play no more,
But skill presides where all was chance before.'

Hoyle's forte was in calculating what may be called the rules of chance (for be it known to the non-mathematical reader chance has rules), and in pointing those calculations to various games.

The furore created by Hoyle's treatise was of no small amount, as may be gathered from the frequent allusions made to it by contemporary authors, and from the numerous publications, serious, facetious, friendly, and adverse, which it evoked. Almost immediately after its publication it drew forth a clever skit, called 'The Polite Gamester; or the Humours of Whist, a Dramatic Satire, as acted every day at White's, and other Coffee-houses and Assemblies.' This pamphlet is now scarce. It introduces us to Hoyle under the designation of Professor Whiston, and to a number of card players, more or less reputable. The clever players, who are represented as sharpers, and men who live by their wits, profess to be very much disgusted at the appearance of the treatise.

On the other hand, the gentlemen are in raptures. The drollest character in the satire is a Sir Calculation Puzzle, a passionate admirer of whist, who gets all Hoyle's odds off by heart, imagines himself a good player, yet always loses; another character, Lord Slim, is supposed to be a pupil of the professor's. Hoyle used to give lessons in whist at a guinea a lesson. Sir Calculation and Lord Slim discuss the merits of the book, as follows:—

'Lord Slim.—How do you like the last edition of his treatise, with the appendix,* Sir Calcula-

* 'The author of this treatise did promise, if it met with approbation, to make an addition to it by way of appendix, which he has done accordingly.'—Hoyle.

* See 'The Pocket Laws of Whist,' by Cavendish.

tion; I mean that signed with his name?*

'*Sir Calculation.*—O, Gad! my lord, there never was so excellent a book printed; I'm quite in raptures with it; I will eat with it, sleep with it, go to court with it, go to parliament with it. I pronounce it the gospel of whist players; and the laws of the game ought to be wrote in golden letters, and hung up in coffee-houses, as much as the ten commandments in parish churches.

'*Sir John Medium.*—Ha! ha! ha! You speak of the book with the zeal of a primitive father.

'*Sir Calculation.*—Not half enough, Sir John; the calculations† are so exact *** his observations‡ are so masterly, his rules§ so comprehensive, his cautions|| so judicious. There are such a variety of cases¶ in his treatise, and the principles are so new, I want words to express my admiration of the author.

* * * *

'*Lord Slim.*—I have joined twelve companies in the Mall, and eleven of them were talking of it. It's the subject of all conversations, and has had the honour to be introduced into the cabinet. Why, thou'lt be laughed at intolerably unless you can tell how many hundred and odd it is for or against one that your partner has or has not such a card or such a card.

'*Sir Calculation.*—Right, my lord; a man would now make as odd a figure without understanding whist,

* * No copies of this book are genuine but what are signed by Edmond Hoyle.—*Advertisement to 'Hoyle's Short Treatise on Whist.'*

† 'Calculations for those who will bet the odds on any points of the score,' &c. 'Calculations directing with moral certainty how to play well any hand or game,' &c.—*Hoyle.*

‡ 'Games to be played with certain observations,' &c.—*Hoyle.*

§ 'Some general rules to be observed,' &c. 'Some particular rules to be observed,'—*Hoyle.*

|| 'A caution not to part with the command of your adversaries' great suit,' &c.—*Hoyle.*

¶ 'With a variety of cases added in the appendix.'—*Hoyle.*

as he would in not knowing how to make a bow.'

A few years later another Hoyle-begotten pamphlet made its appearance. It was a moral paper, dissuading from play. It is only interesting on account of its title, which is ingeniously framed so as to obtain admission for the pamphlet into card circles. It was entitled, 'Calculations, Cautions, and Observations relating to various Games played with Cards. By Edmond Hoyle, jun.' The writer, under this pseudonym (which was, of course, adopted to catch the eye), professed to be Hoyle's nephew. About the same time was published 'An Address to Persons of Fashion, relating to Balls, Play-houses, Card-tables, &c.,' which alludes to Hoyle, and contains the following critique on whist-playing:—

'We read in history of a Roman emperor who spent his time in the catching of flies. Surely our modern nobility and gentry may justly claim the privilege of diverting themselves a few hours in an evening in counting black and red spots, and asking, "What's trumps?" "Who shuffled?" and "Who dealt?"'

'Bob Short' was published in 1792 (?), and became almost as famous as Hoyle. Bob Short's fame is built on that of Hoyle. 'Bob Short' only professed to be 'Hoyle Abridged.' It is said that seven thousand copies were sold in twelve months.

Hoyle has been several times translated. In 1776 a translation was published at Vienna; and, in 1786, Hoyle was admitted into the 'Académie Universelle des Jeux,' published at Amsterdam.

About sixty years after the first appearance of Hoyle, Mathews published his 'Advice to the Young Whist Player, containing most of the Maxims of the Old School, with the Author's Observations on those he thinks erroneous.' His advice was listened to through a number of editions. Indeed, Mathews may be regarded as the next writer of any pretension after Hoyle. Mathews's 'Rules and Maxims' are

* See 'The Pocket Guide to Whist,' by Cavendish.

terse, pithy, and epigrammatic, commanding attention, and fixing themselves strongly on the memory.

Since Mathews's day another sixty years has elapsed, and many works on whist have issued from the press, but none which bear any marks of true, original genius.* All, even including the treatises of Hoyle and Mathews, exhibit two principal defects. In the first place, the rules of play are commonly laid down as so many isolated and arbitrary conventions, the reasons on which the directions are based being seldom stated, or not stated with sufficient fulness. In the second place, suitable illustrations, by which alone the principles of play can be brought forcibly home, are almost entirely wanting in books on whist. The writer of this paper has endeavoured in his published 'Hands,'† and in his 'Principles of Whist,' to remedy these deficiencies; but, of course, it would not become him to criticise the productions of his own pen.

We have now traced the progress

* Since this was written, J. C.'s 'Treatise on Short Whist' has appeared, which must be excepted from this criticism.

† It can hardly be denied that the most instructive plan for illustrating principles, is to furnish a selection of hands played completely through as at the card-table, and accompanied by explanations. A similar plan has long been in use in treatises on chess. See 'The Laws and Principles of Whist,' by Cavendish.

of whist, from its obscure origin to its present brilliant condition. Whether the game is susceptible of yet higher elaboration, or whether its science has by this time reached the zenith, time alone can show. There can, however, be no doubt of this, that, during the last hundred and twenty years, whist has progressed to a pitch of high and refined development. Though chance enters into it largely, the combinations which arise afford such numerous openings for the employment of skill, that the interest of a hand never flags, and the mental powers are kept moderately and pleasantly occupied. The cessation of the play between the hands, like the 'pause' between the beats of the heart, affords just the necessary quantum of refreshment, and so obviates the ill effects of long-sustained effort. Hence, at whist, the amusement, interest, and relaxation of those engaged are, one and all, together promoted to the utmost. The game has the good fortune of combining the means of innocent recreation, of healthy excitement, and of appropriate mental exercise; and, owing to its simplicity of construction, its never-ending variety, and its well-balanced proportions of skill and chance, it fulfils the social requirements of a game better than any other. Of whist it may be said that, like the Turk, it 'bears no brother near its throne.'



Social Sketches.

BY JACK EASEL, ESQUIRE.

No. I.—A FASHIONABLE NEIGHBOURHOOD.

IN the days of my earliest youth I confess to have entertained some pardonable foibles. To some of them, which have unfortunately grown up with me, I will not now refer. They are pretty well known to my friends, and indeed those kind, good Mentors are never likely to let me forget them. It is astonishing what disinterested philanthropy one often meets with in this way from people who good-naturedly neglect their own failings in order to devote themselves more zealously to discussing and endeavouring to rectify the faults of others. I hope I shall always be deeply grateful for their solicitude; and inasmuch as my later errors thus receive ample attention, I think it advisable to say as little as possible on that score myself. But just as a man can talk with the utmost complacency about his recently-extracted molar, which cost him such throes of agony (in addition to Mr. Tugwell's little fee) before he could part with it, so we can all allude, without undue remorse or blushing, to the juvenile follies which no longer find place in our composition. I had then certain *faiblesses** which I am not ashamed to own. I was very weak about appearances.

Educated at the orthodox and eminently-respectable establishment of Eastminster, I began life with an idea that the manners and customs of my sixth-form schoolfellows represented a standard of etiquette from which it was impossible with propriety to depart. I had a great horror of carrying parcels in a public thoroughfare (except, of course, when it fell within the proper and legitimate duties of a fag, who could have no earthly right to object to take my wellingtons to the boot-

* The author of 'The Queen's English' is respectfully solicited to postpone his denunciation of this word until he has finished reading the article.

maker's, or fetch a pottle of strawberries from round the corner). I conceived it beneath my dignity to appear on the outside of an omnibus, and I never felt sincerer chagrin than when espied in that elevated but ignominious position by my friend Dashleigh, who was driving down Pall Mall with young Raikesmere (once of Eastminster, but at that time a cornet in the Blues). There they were seated, side by side, in an elegant cab of the most perfect build and appointments, which the beardless warrior had just purchased, and was piloting, in lemon-coloured gloves, with dainty skill along the street, and (what a contrast!) there was I wedged between a plebeian Jehu and my stout old uncle John, a Devonshire agriculturist, who had come up for the cattle-show, and insisted that I should accompany him to that place of bucolic entertainment. I say I looked down upon Raikesmere's faultless equipage with a deep sense of humiliation; I even fancied the young urchin of a tiger, who was quivering behind it in top-boots, seemed to recognize and enjoy my confusion. I believe I blushed crimson in trying to avoid Dashleigh's glance.

'Why, what's the matter with the lad?' asked my uncle. (Fancy calling me, a fifth-form fellow, a *lad*!)

'N—nothing,' said I, 'only—'

'Only what, my boy?' persisted the old gentleman, who, to do him justice, was as great a trump as ever lived.

'Only one of my schoolfellows, who drove by just now in that cab, and—'

'And spied yew on top of an omnibus, hey?' cried the shrewd old squire, who saw at once which way the wind blew. 'Ha, ha, ha! wal, that is a gowd joke! Why I du believe you're half ashamed of your old uncle and his ways. Ha, ha, ha!

That was a pooty little mare he was driving though. Law bless the boy! he turned as red as a turkey-cock, I du declare,' continued my excellent but somewhat aggravating relative, in a fit of laughter, which did not entirely subside until we reached Baker Street.

The foregoing anecdote is trifling, but may serve to show the sagacious reader the tendency of my aspirations at sixteen. At that interesting epoch, and for a few years afterwards, I had very grand notions of what a gentleman might or might not do; how he should or should not dress, and where he ought or ought not to be seen. I numbered at least three members of our British aristocracy among my school acquaintance, and on the strength of their friendship, assumed prodigious airs. My father's house was but a few miles from the country town of Todbury, where Mr. Probus, surgeon-accoucheur, had a brass plate on his front door, intimating the nature of his profession in bold characters. Young P. was at Eastminster in my time, and frequently complained to me, in the holidays, of the coldness with which he was treated by a mutual schoolfellow, Marmaduke, son of the Rev. Minton Tyler, rector of an adjoining parish, and one of the minor canons in Todbury Minster. Master Tyler's papa was also chaplain to the Earl of Toughborough, and by consequence thought his boy could not contract a more useful friendship than that of the earl's son, Lord Stonehouse. To say the truth, the young gentleman did his best to recommend himself in that direction, and I always imagined that [the two would become sworn friends; but chancing one afternoon to ride over to Todbury for some cigars, I met Lord Stonehouse in Mr. Cavendish's shop, and as we fell talking of Eastminster fellows, the little viscount alluded to Tyler (of the under fifth form) in terms of anything but respect.

'Hang it, Easel,' said his lordship, 'you may do as you like, of course, and go about with him, and all that, but I can't stand the fellow, he's so horribly familiar.'

Thus you see in this little town

of Todbury and its neighbourhood there were three sets or grades of even schoolboy life. There was the doctor's son, who wanted to chum with the parson's son, and the parson's offspring, who wished to be on even terms with an earl's heir; but the earl's heir wouldn't cotton to the parson's son, and the parson's son gave a cold shoulder (as the phrase goes) to the doctor's boy. And a very proper and highly-civilized state of society it was, to be sure, and my only wonder, in looking back at those youthful days, is how on earth I managed to keep on a friendly footing with all three.

Entertaining, as I have said, very lofty notions of men and things in general, I set out in life with the determination of becoming a swell. Residential London was then, to my finite and restricted capabilities of perception, bounded on the north by Oxford Street, on the south by Piccadilly, on the east by Regent Street, and on the west by Park Lane. It was in the destrable locality of Mayfair that I first took up my quarters. I engaged a second-floor suite of rooms in Curzon Street, and congratulated myself that I was living in a fashionable neighbourhood.

Beyond the fact that my landlord had once been butler in a distinguished household, and was a first-rate hand at lobster-salad, I am not aware that I derived any immediate advantage from the position. It enabled me, however, to become acquainted with the general out-of-door aspect of life at this end of town, during a period when my professional duties left me ample leisure for observation.

Since that memorable epoch, my habits and opinions, I admit, have undergone a change. The proprieties of life, as exemplified by the address on a man's card or the cut of his trousers, have lost something of their former importance. I no longer endure martyrdom to please my bootmaker, or seek to increase my stature by 'military heels.' I am not above riding on the top of an omnibus; and last week I called on a friend at Pentonville with the utmost affability. But though these changes have occurred, and though

I am fully aware of the fact that for years past the rank and fashion of this capital have been flocking westward, that Belgravian mansions are much in request, and that Tyburnia has an aristocracy of its own, still one feels that there is an air of ancient respectability—a *prestige**—about Mayfair which raises it above the modern splendour of suburban establishments. You may walk through miles of showy house-fronts north of Oxford Road and south of Piccadilly. Those mansions glitter with paint, with sham Corinthian capitals, with gimcrack imitations of carving in cement. Alack! they are but whited sepulchres: their glory is short-lived. From the moment when Mr. Plasterer has laid aside his trowel and the last scaffold-pole is removed, a work of destruction begins—sure, steady, and inevitable. Before the second year's rent is paid, acanthus-leaves are chipped away; stucco masks are peeling off; the whole façade bears dreary evidence of incipient ruin, and, like the complexions of Madame Rachel's clients, has to be renewed, from time to time, in order to render it 'beautiful for ever.'

Far different with the sturdy brick-faced houses of Mayfair. Conscious of their superiority, they had no cheap and flimsy decoration to assert it. Their walls, perhaps, are less attractive; but they are solid and laid on good foundations; their window-frames are stout and strongly hung. The iron-work about their gates and areas is boldly wrought. These brick extinguishers have put out more than one generation of smoking flambeaux, and survived a whole pedigree of lamp-lighters. Up those well-worn steps how many sedan chairs, bepatched and furbelowed dames, bewigged and powdered dandies of the last century have passed! As I stroll through the streets surrounding this classic region, the ghost of old-world greatness rises up before me. I see Lord Fellamar strutting along, with his hanger peeping from his

gold-laced coat-skirts, and Lady Bellaston borne home by two stout chairmen through Hanover Square, furtively followed by Mr. Thomas Jones. I peep in through the ancient casements, and see Squire Western, in homely russet, surrounded and worried by his town lady-cousins; or imagine Belinda at her toilet on the second-floor, sipping chocolate out of Dresden china, with a French poodle at her feet. I fancy Sir Roger de Coverley stepping from his hackney-coach; and Will Honeycomb, in high-heeled shoes, tripping jauntily down to Garraway's after dining with some of 'the quality.' The stately ladies, the magnificent beaux, who flocked to Court in the early Georgian era, have long since been gathered to their fathers. Their grandchildren have grown up—have eaten, drunk, and died within these walls. A fourth generation has survived to the age of foggery; but some of the brave old streets have scarcely changed their aspect since the author of *Tristram Shandy* hired his lodgings in Bond Street, and Sir Joshua Reynolds set up his easel in Leicester Fields.

Is there a dignity in dulness?—an air of grandeur derivable from London soot? Is it possible that these begrimed and dingy tenements do really represent the London homes of half our aristocracy?—that titles, wealth, pure blood, gentle manners, hold their own within those gloomy portals? Fancy transporting a Venetian nobleman from his stately palace on the Grand Canal, or bringing a Roman *marchese* straight from his mansion in the Corso, and having set either of these worthies down in one of the streets adjoining Berkeley Square, telling him that he was in the midst of the most fashionable quarter of the wealthiest city in the world; that the plain commercial-looking fronts of brick and mortar which he saw around him, were the London residences of the proudest families in haughty England!

'*Ma, che!*' I think I hear the artless alien incredulously exclaim. In his own country the poorest tradesman (no doubt he thinks),

* The Dean of Canterbury is again entreated to be calm for a few pages longer.

could boast a finer home. *Aspetta un momento*—wait an instant, my dear sir, until we have rapped a double—or, let us say, a sextuple knock, at that olive-green door, and have seen the elegant youth in silk stockings, canary-coloured smalls, mulberry cloth coat, and silver buttons, who will answer the summons. His hair has grown prematurely grey, under the combined influence of the flour-dredge and pomatum-pot. Surely he must be the *maggiordomo*, the *chef* of the establishment. *Altro!* my dear, he is only an under-foot-man. He scrutinizes us with a curious eye, and having inspected our cards, hands them over to an overgrown cherub in a tight-fitting suit, who announces our names to a third gentleman on the landing, who will usher us into the drawing-room. That portly, clerical-looking person with a bald head, whom we passed in the hall, was not his lordship's chaplain, but the butler—guardian, my dear count, of liquid treasures which you wot not of. In his keeping are rich and rare juices of 'that generous fruit which is grown on the banks of the Douro, and in the sunny gardens of Andalusia; the choicest produce of the fertile plains of Burgundy and Ardennes. Compared with these priceless draughts, the vintage of your own 'Orvieto' sinks into utter insignificance, and even famed 'Montefiascone' is as a thing of nought. In wines that gentleman is a distinguished connoisseur. He could talk to you of Richebourg and Chambertin, Lafitte and Château Margaux. He recognizes and appreciates the Amontillado flavour, and can decant Oporto with the hand of an artist. No delusive cobwebs or fictitious 'beeswing' will take *him* in. He knows to a year the age of every cork. He discriminates nicely between 'full-bodied' and 'dry,' between 'fruity' and 'fine bouquet' samples. He has his particular bin, his favourite brand. What will you? It is his profession, and he follows it with fidelity.

But come, let us mount this ample staircase so softly carpeted with triple pile, and fragrant with perfumes from the adjoining conser-

vatory, between walls of scaglio, delicately painted in imitation of serpentine, rouge royal, and Brocattella marbles. Here and there is a niche, occupied by a copy of some antique statue, or one of Canova's nymphs. If any dust still lingers on your feet, shake it off upon the dainty leopard's-skin which lies athwart the ante-chamber door. Then enter, my friend, and feast your eyes upon the vista before you—a suite of rooms, furnished, not indeed in accordance with any strict principles of art, but with what an air of comfort, of luxury, of easy grandeur! Look at the chaste diaper of pale green and gold upon the walls; the tables and chairs inlaid with precious wood and ivory; the grotesquely-carved cabinets filled with Oriental china; the ormolu clock, reflected in a richly-gilded mirror on the mantel-piece; the silken curtains heavy with parti-coloured fringe; the Brussels carpet, glowing with a hundred tints; the soft, plump, downy sofas; the handsome, lazy-looking ottoman; the brilliantly-embroidered fire-screens; the Indian hearth-rug; the embossed leather stool (on which how many dainty feet have rested); the score of idle, useless, pretty knick-nacks scattered at random on all sides,—look, I say, on these profuse and multi-form insignia of modern London life, and confess they have a charm which none but a cynic will refuse to feel. It is not, we know, in the correctest taste: it is not high art. We could not have expected David Roberts or Louis Haghe to sit down and make a picture of the scene: but take it for what it is worth; an evidence of uneducated love of beauty—a type of splendid hospitality, exemplified in the ordinary requirements of an English home,—and tell me, monsieur le Marquis, do you know its equal anywhere across the water?

I know such a drawing-room not a hundred miles from Berkeley Square, where I have wasted many happy hours, at a time when the fit of a kid glove, the colour of a neck tie, the shape of a coat collar really seemed things worthy of serious attention. I suppose most of us,

sooner or later, at some period at least of our existence, pass through this pleasant, thriftless, dandified phase of life. It is not entirely a selfish one, remember. We don't wear white waistcoats and geraniums in our buttonholes to please ourselves alone. There is some slight touch of endurance, some little sacrifice of personal comfort in the tight boots of a *petit maître*. If women will set a false value on the tailor's art; if they insist on giving a preference to ball-room partners whose feet are below the average size, is it our fault that we run up bills with Mr. Poole, and limp about in diminutive Balmorals? Psha! I am talking of the last *decennium*, when Lady Anne was still in her teens. Let us dismiss our illustrious foreign friend the count (or marquis, as the case may be). He is, you see, only a mythical personage: let the powdered lacqueys show him down-stairs, and leave me alone with my charmer.

Whatever may be urged in favour of the present style of ladies' dress (and that it has merits, I, for one, will not deny), there can be little doubt that the pre-crinolinian age revealed a deal of feminine comeliness in what has been described as 'locomotive' beauty, which of late years has been hidden from us. Few women sit gracefully in a hoop, and, as for walking, if they moved on castors instead of feet, we should hardly perceive the difference under the present system of dress. It was some years after Lady Anne's first season that the dreadful *jupon* was invented. Her earliest appearance on the London world was in the simple unexaggerated dress then in vogue, and which, to my mind, suited her infinitely better than the cumbrous farthingale in which she now appears as a British matron. Would you have me describe it? Alack! the subject is beyond my humble powers of description. What should men know about these things? Turn back to the 'Gazette of Fashion,' or 'Le Follet' for 1851, and no doubt you will find it there correctly detailed. In that bewitching morning robe, whose cambric folds were gathered in snugly by a

ribbon girdle round her waist, only to escape again and fall in exquisite confusion round her feet, as she tripped about in the conservatory, with a pair of scissors or a watering-pot in her hand, carefully tending her plants, clipping a withered leaf from some geranium, or pouring gentle showers on mignonette—she looked like a modern Flora—like Sir Joshua's 'Age of Innocence,' just budding into womanhood. On fair spring mornings I have seen the rays of an early sun come dancing through her boudoir window and encircle her golden hair with a nimbus of precious light. Her eyes were of that lovely changeable blue which I ransacked my colour-box in vain to reproduce on canvas. With pretty pouting lips, whose gentle curves equally defied my pencil, she would prattle the most charming follies, the pleasantest nonsense that ever man listened to. Was there not some excuse for loitering and dawdling in such company? Sure, if idleness is the root of all evil, that unlucky bulb comes to wonderful perfection under woman's care.

At the time of which I am writing the eloquent author of 'Modern Painters' had just brought out a charming little hand-book for the use of amateurs. Young ladies who were tired of the stupid old conventional method of learning to draw by copying Jullien's heads, *études aux deux crayons*, or pencil landscapes, in which the foliage of trees looked like endless yards of tumbled ribbon—first students, I say, who, feeling their utter inability to portray the family cat, had come to disbelieve in graduated paper, on which wonderful effects were to be produced by scratching out stars and moonlit waves with a penknife, or executing bold and massive foregrounds with Galpin's famous treble B's, began to see the importance of Mr. Ruskin's advice, and there was a little *furor* for his sound and practical system of instruction. My Lady Anne, who, you must remember, was *du monde*, and always anxious to do whatever her illustrious friends recommended, bought this little grammar of art, and

straightway fell to washing shilling cakes of Prussian blue over sixpenny sheets of Bristol boards, and copying all the plants in her conservatory. Having a considerable, and, I fear I must add, unmerited respect for my powers as a draughtsman (indeed I had scarcely been twelve months in Mr. Mastie's atelier, and my first Dying Gladiator was a lamentable failure), she insisted on my coming to B—— street twice a week for the purpose of inspecting her sketches and helping her by my advice.

I fear, as far as the last was concerned, these visits did not much help the progress of either master or pupil; but it enabled me to spend many delightful mornings in the company of one who—well, never mind now: young gentlemen whose professional receipts do not amount to more than 300*l.* a year should not be too ambitious. I suppose we might add another 0 to that sum for the numerical expression of her present husband's income. It was that little cipher which forbade me to *sigh* for my mistress any more, and by this venerable little pun the ingenious reader will perceive that I have long ago awakened from a foolish dream.

The neglect of modern languages in public school education is proverbial, and, in my day, I really believe an Eastminster boy who spoke French tolerably well would have been set down as a muff. When I left school I could just construe my 'Telemachus' with a dictionary, and I leave you to judge that the adventures of that remarkable hero, as described by M. Fénelon, did not much help my powers of conversation when, a few years afterwards, I took up my abode in the Quartier Latin.

Whether Lady Anne, being aware of my deficiency in this point, was pleased to enjoy my confusion or not, I cannot say, but she insisted on rallying me in French whenever we were alone.

'Mademoiselle Lecreux (her governess) me défend absolument de parler autre chose que le français jusqu'à midi,' she remarked one

morning, in answer to my remonstrances.

'That's unfortunate for me,' said I, 'for, as you know very well, I can't talk to you in the same tongue. How do you get on with your sketching? I see you have been at work. That is not your study of a hyacinth, is it?'

'Mais oui! dites-moi ce que vous en pensez.'

'I think you are improving wonderfully: you really have a capital eye for colour.' (Here she dropped me such a saucy curtsy that I would have given worlds to sketch the attitude.) 'Do you know, Lady Anne, that I am beginning to draw from the Life now. One of my landlady's daughters sat to me last week as a flower-girl.'

'Par exemple!' cries my lady, laughing, 'Aimez vous les fleurs? Laissez-moi donc mettre un bouton de rose à votre habit. Là! Vous avez l'air ravissant! Combien votre hôteesse a-t-elle de demoiselles? Elles raffoleront de vous, Monsieur Easel.'

'I don't think they have much chance of captivating me at present,' I answer, gloomily; 'besides, I have little time for such flirtations. Really it is impossible to do much work in the season with so many interruptions. By the way, I have not seen you since Lady Lynkman's soirée. May I compliment you on your dress? it was the prettiest in the room.'

'Bien, Monsieur, vous avez admiré ma robe de bal. J'en suis extrêmement flattée. J'étais loin de me douter que vous l'aviez remarquée. D'ailleurs, vous avez fait des yeux doux à Miss Petworth. Mais elle est brunette et je sais que vous adorez les brunettes,' she said, playing with one of her own golden tresses.

At this moment a double knock was heard at the door, and, peeping out of window, whom should I see alighting from his brougham but that insufferable puppy Sir James Greenhorne. What *could* that fellow want here at this hour of the morning? His cab was always trundling into B—— Street. Confound it! why had not I a handle to

my name, or a commission in the Guards, or a gold mine in Peru, or a seat in Parliament, or something to make me *somebody*? I would even have cared if I had been six feet high, but unfortunately my stature stopped short by at least five inches of that recognized standard. Such were my bitter reflections when I rose to take my leave of Lady Anne.

'Good-bye,' she said, taking my hand kindly, and at last, thank goodness, speaking in her own mother tongue; 'papa and I ride this afternoon; will you join us in the Row?'

Of course I said that I should be delighted; and hastily rushing down stairs, where I encountered the youthful baronet, who (deuce take him!) gave me two fingers to shake with an air of great condescension, I made the best of my way to Snaffle and Bateman's livery stables, and ordered my old mount, the grey hack, at a ruinous cost of one-and-twenty shillings, to be ready for me at four o'clock.

A pretty little bill, I promise you, Messrs. S. and B. sent me in at Christmas, which I received along with another missive from Mowbray and Melton (artists in coats), to say nothing of a little memorandum 'to account rendered, with Mr. Jehoshaphat's best thanks and respectful compliments.' This latter was for studs, a signet-ring engraved with the Easel crest (a *chevalet* proper, with a palette *crased* and a paint-pot *gules*), a scarf-pin or two, and a few sleeve-links. You see I was not particularly extravagant, but felt it incumbent on me to dress with *ton*. I have said that my ambition was to be of the great world, and a young gentleman cannot even step on the borders of that ancient territory without incurring a certain amount of expense. The roads are steep and heavy, and the toll-gates innumerable. I wasted some money, and a great deal of precious time, in that hopeless journey. I thought it my duty (at one-and-twenty) to do everything and go everywhere in the cause of swiftness. I attended drums and conversaziones, where I was bored to death; visited people for whom I did not care; went to

concerts which I could not appreciate; I turned into the Park at stated times with unerring punctuality; took in the 'Morning Post,' and thought I felt a genuine interest in 'fashionable intelligence.' Some of my aristocratic companions—you must remember they were beardless—affected a pronunciation which I am sure would have caused our late respected lexicographer, Mr. Walker, the greatest consternation. Perhaps I fell into some such folly myself. What matters? these frailties don't last through life. Some of us catch them at a certain youthful period, just as children get the measles or hooping-cough, and shake off the disorder. It is no doubt very objectionable at the time, but the evil is only transient. There is poor little Georgy in bed, with darkened windows, or Master Tom making the house ring with his cough. One morning in comes the physician to feel Georgy's pulse, or examine the state of Tom's tonsils. Aha! the skilful doctor's medicine has done them a world of good. The patients are better this morning. Pull aside the curtain,—strip off that flannel and hartshorn: the boys are convalescent. So, when Dr. Common Sense raps at our door in later life,—when the light of wisdom streams in upon us, we open our eyes to our foibles, throw away all affectation, and speak in natural accents.

To know the world thoroughly, in all its phases, one must live in and with it. I do not in the least regret my brief and harmless worship of the pretty, little, smirking, fickle deity of Fashion. I have long foresworn the innocent idolatry which has supplied me with many a theme for fun and, I hope, inoffensive satire.

Sometimes it happens that in touching of old times—alluding to this or that peculiarity—a man catches in the voice, or with the pen, a little of the character he is attempting to describe. My readers may remember an account of a certain 'Little Hop in Harley Street,' which appeared in the fourth volume of 'London Society.' It was written by their humble servant, the author

of these lines, who endeavoured to realize in his description the manners and customs of the professedly frivolous characters introduced. A good sprinkling of French epithets was purposely used, to illustrate and ridicule the nature of their conversation.

Well, a few months afterwards, about this merry Christmas time, as I was sitting in my chambers over an honest pipe, who should come in but one of those kind, good creatures to whom I made especial reference in the first page of this article. 'Ah, Easel, my boy,' said this amiable soul, 'I've got something for you. Have you seen Alford's book?' And out he pulled from his pocket one of the neatest little cloth-bound octavo volumes you ever saw. It was, in fact, a celebrated work, called 'The Queen's English,' which is to reform and remodel all the language of our time and country, and this herculean task being first accomplished, the author will have ample leisure to sit down and improve his own.*

Now I am not going to be so presumptuous as to enter the lists against so learned and doughty a champion as the Dean of Canterbury, especially as the comments on my article which his book contains are not from his own pen, but quoted from that of a sprightly critic in the 'Leeds Mercury.' But this I will say, that before Mr. Dean endorsed the sentiments of the latter gentleman, it might, perhaps, have been as well for him to read the article to which they referred. If he had done so, he would have perceived the error into which his literary friend had fallen.

'We have before us,' says the son of Coelus, 'an article from the pen of a very clever writer' (my best respects to you, Mr. Critic, for the compliment), 'and as it appears in a magazine which specially professes to represent the "best society," it may be taken as a good specimen of the style.' Then, having inveighed against the lamentable practice of introducing foreign phrases into English literature, he

* See 'The Dean's English,' by Washington Moon.

goes on to quote, say a half-dozen French words from the 'Little Hop,' but in so vast a hurry is our mercurial critic to drive his moral home, that he is actually at the trouble to invent, and ascribe to me, perhaps, another half-dozen, which I never used at all, to say nothing of making a couple of mistakes himself, to which the careful dean is ungrateful enough to call attention.

Why my dear, good, light-fingered, wing-footed Hermes, can't you tell when a man is in joke and when he is talking seriously? Did you really think when I said that 'our own language could never adequately express the beauties of a lady's toilette'—did you actually imagine I was in earnest? If so, I forgive you with all my heart; but if not, know, once for all, that I wrote my description of the 'Little Hop' as I have written a dozen other such articles, and hope to write a dozen more, not for very reverend etymologists, nor even for brilliant censors like yourself, but for the thousands of idle, gossiping dandies and London flirts who don't mind seeing in print the sort of converse they hold with each other. In that spirit the greatest humourist this century has produced in England—perhaps in any country—dear old Thackeray himself, did not disdain to affect the popular taste. 'Vanity Fair,' 'Pendennis,' 'The Newcomes,'—all his pictures of modern life, are full of this foreign frippery. He *knew* it was frippery, but he went on using it, because he chose to paint the world as he found it rather than as it ought to be. If he was wrong, I can only say that I am not ashamed to err in such company.

This has been a rather long digression, and you will therefore be pleased to suppose that in the interval four o'clock has arrived, and my Park hack is waiting at the door. I mount and ride through Curzon Street, that strange old motley thoroughfare of desirable residences and somewhat undesirable shops. Yet even some of the latter have an air of respectability about them. There is the turner's and brush manufacturer's, for in-

stance, over the way, which looks as if it had been established at least half a century. There is the chemist's, in whose window charming jars of calcined magnesia, Russian rhubarb, and Jamaica ginger at once inspire respect and invite the epicure. There is the dairyman's, with its shining milk cans, plaster cow, trophies of fresh-laid eggs, and stuffed birds with gorgeous plumage. There is the cheesemonger's, with a goodly array of ripe Stilton cylinders, and varnished tongues. There is the Sun Court, with its narrow, girder-bridged alley, leading to a labyrinth of other courts. There is the Sun tavern, a venerable establishment, with a jolly portrait of old Sol himself, begirt with gilded rays, and smiling down upon thirsty souls like a benignant star-fish. There is the Curzon Chapel, which suggests the notion of a mechanics' institute on half pay; and finally, up beyond there, are the great gaunt walls of Chesterfield House, the very name of which bears evidence of courtly grandeur.

Well, I ride along by a circuitous route (for a reason best known to myself) towards Berkeley Square, passing through a region inhabited by the most illustrious members of society, the *crème de la crème* (forgive me, Alford!) of the professions— aspiring members of parliament; eminent legal gentlemen, who expect unheard-of fees upon every brief they accept; highly successful physicians, who drive home with their pockets full of guineas; gallant staff officers, decorated with more orders than they can conveniently wear; and titled grandees, whose calling in life is to do nothing,

and who have admirably fulfilled that mission;—all these help, by turns, to make up the population of Mayfair.

I amble into Berkeley Square itself, and look up at cheerful green verandahs supported on slender columns, neat little oriel windows of plate-glass, and lozenge-shaped hatchments, announcing the fact that there is rest in heaven, and various other facts, concerning which the undertaker is supposed to be peculiarly well informed. Who could suppose that those windows, filled with a bashful display of bonbons and barley-sugar drops, constitute the sole insignia which the great, the magnificent Gunter cares to exhibit? That quiet-looking house in the corner might be a private mansion, but for the modest inscription which proclaims it to be Thomas's Hotel.

Open barouches roll to and fro; natty little broughams stand patiently at the doors, or under shadow of the trees. Well-groomed nags are waiting for their riders, attended by spruce, white-neck-clothed, belted footmen. I look up at a certain window in B— Street, and finding ~~she~~ is gone, trot briskly onwards to Hyde Park, and canter down the Row to meet her. What! is it possible that—yes, it *must* be Sir James Greenhorne by her side. Oh! this is too—

* * *

You see I have been using what grammarians call the 'historic' present tense; but the fact is, all that I have recounted is of past time.

I will only add that I no longer live in a fashionable neighbourhood.

JACK EASEL.

A FAST RUN AND A DOUBLE KILL.

A Tale of the Field and Drawing-room.

'WHAT a horrid day!' was my first exclamation, one dreary-looking morning in November, as my maid drew aside the window-curtains and let in a dismal landscape of park and garden, enveloped in sheets of mist, which came

driving up the valley, and wreathed round the crests of the wooded hills, shutting out completely from my sight the long line of the dear old moor.

'How I do hate weather of this kind!'

'Perhaps it will clear off, Miss,' observed Margaret, in a consolatory tone, as she filled my bath. But I knew too well what the thick grey mist portended, to be beguiled into hoping that we were not in for a wet day. I arose rather dispirited and what is commonly called 'out of sorts.' Not that I am one of those people whose spirits are after the fashion of a barometer, rising and falling with the changes of the weather. And as to caring for rain, why from the time that I was a scrap of eight years old I have been accustomed to brave all weathers in company with my dearly-beloved brother Jack; for having no sisters he had filled the place of all other companionship to me. Little Bob, my other brother, was nine years my junior, the deaths of intervening brothers, many years back, having placed this wide difference between myself and the 'baby of the family.' The constant absence of Jack, who was now in the Guards, gave Bob brevet rank during the holidays, and he and I had consequently a fellowship in many pursuits. Perhaps, presuming on the knowledge that I was sometimes dependent on him, Master Bob was disposed to be immensely patronizing. He appeared at such times to disregard the fact of my being nineteen years old—and 'come out'—and would affect to pooh-pooh my opinions on certain subjects, resorting to the old assumption, 'What can a girl know about such things?' There was one point, however, which was rarely a subject of discussion between my small brother and myself, and that was riding. Bob was as plucky a little fellow as ever counted ten years, or bore home from school the traces of a hundred fights in divers discolorations about his round rosy face. He would have been the first to volunteer in the lead of a forlorn hope into the dangerous preserves of a tempting orchard, although the entrance to that paradise of schoolboys may have been guarded by the most bloodthirsty of mastiffs. Bob was a little hero *sans peur et sans reproche* in all matters save one. He could not and he would not ride. Now riding was

the darling passion of my heart, though I had as yet had but a limited scope for its indulgence. My brother Jack was one of the hardest and most daring riders in his regiment. The amount of steeplechases, hurdle races, etc., in which he had distinguished himself, were faithfully recorded in my own especial diary—a charming little volume bound in green velvet, with a real gold key. Bob declined taking this step in our direction. He had a pony, but they were on the most distant terms of friendship and association; and I have known the occasion when Bob has been moved to tears on being forced by my father to follow us over a very small gap in a hedge, where crawling *vice* leaping was the only mode of progression required from the pony. It was in vain that Jack coaxed and bullied him by turns on the subject. Even Aunt Tabitha—of whom both Bob and myself stood in a certain awe—failed to produce any effect, when she would observe, with the shade of a sneer in her voice, that 'it was a pity Eleanor and Bob could not exchange tastes.' I came in for my share of the sarcastic rebuke, for my love of the equine race, and a certain leaning to what Aunt Tabitha called 'unfeminine pursuits,' insured to me a long series of sermons preached by my aunt in the course of her annual three months' visit to us.

Aunt Tabitha was a maiden sister of my father; and I sometimes think that the dear old governor himself was not quite exempt from the feeling of restraint which her dignified manner and tall gaunt figure had the power of impressing on those around her. She looked many years older than my father. In fact she was one of those women who could never have been young, and who seem to be sent into the world for the express purpose of checking the natural impulses of youth on reformatory principles. Why is it that those moral brooms never sweep as clean as they are intended to sweep? Jack and I used to say our catechisms to her when we were children; and it is quite shocking to think of the distaste to all religious duties with which Aunt

Tabitha's teaching inspired us at that early period of our lives.

It was not only that her aim seemed to be to convince us that we were two little sinners modelled wholly for the exercise of continual punishment, but that the paths of righteousness were so very steep as to make our attainment of them an impossible feat. So painful was her discipline, that it prompted the wretched Jack to exclaim one weary Sunday afternoon, 'That if Aunt Tabitha was to be his guide into that narrow way, he would rather travel down the broad road by himself.' It is scarcely necessary to add that he was forced to atone this heresy in the sackcloth and ashes of solitary confinement. And yet poor Aunt Tabitha was a good woman after all. In my mind there yet lingers a grateful remembrance of her kind nursing and care of me during an attack of measles, which happened when I was staying with her. How patient she was with me in those irritable hours of convalescence, when even old nurse exclaimed that 'Miss Nelly was a worritin' little subject when she was bad.'

Aunt Tabitha under her frigid exterior possessed a warm heart, of which my father was the idol; and on the latter point we would always meet without risk of opinions clashing. To my way of thinking, my father is a fine specimen of a thorough English country gentleman—in manner, in character, in heart, and in pursuits. Generous to a fault, kind and courteous to all, he was firm and unflinching in matters of conscience and duty. 'Squire Vavasour,' was a name revered and loved by friends of high and low degree. No wonder Aunt Tabitha was proud of him. He was rather like her in person: the same pure and classical outline of feature, but softened in my father's face by the kindly beaming glance of his dark-blue eyes, of which time had not dimmed the sparkling lustre. He was a keen sportsman, and although turned of sixty, I am proud to say that no younger man could ride straighter to hounds, or fly his fences with greater ease. He possessed also that rare virtue—consideration

for his horse—which, in my very limited experience, I have observed is a very rare virtue indeed. Many a man can ride hard; but, as Jack says, not so very many spare their horses also—that happy combination being confided to the few. There is another advantage my father possesses over the mass of his kind. He can talk on other topics besides hunting; differing widely in this respect from our neighbour, Sir Ralph Kelly, who has but that one subject on which he can discourse freely. Whenever he comes to dine with us, I amuse myself by watching Aunt Tabitha's face whilst the worthy baronet drones on through every detail of a run,—how he thought his horse Vagabond would clear some tremendous place, and he didn't,—and how the hounds performed some feat, engrossing, no doubt, in reality, but frightfully tedious in description. It was a fortunate thing for his other guests that my father's port was fine and old, as I have heard on the best authority, that the 'blushing fluid' is a wonderful support under such circumstances. The potent spell, however, did not work its charm on poor Aunt Tabitha; and I could have sympathized more fully with her look of weariness and disgust, had I not felt disposed to be wickedly rejoiced that she was undergoing a fitting chastisement for her unpardonable offence towards myself. As ill luck would have it, Aunt Tabitha's visits were always happening during the hunting season. Now my chief fault in her eyes was my devotion to riding, which she called 'being fast'; but I put it to any sensible, impartial person, promising to abide by their arbitration, if a woman cannot combine a taste for riding with inclinations of a purely feminine character, and if she shall not be able to appreciate an occasional gallop with the hounds and at the same time prove herself to be, when the occasion occurs, the most womanly and tender of sick nurses. By the way, when poor Jack came home wounded from the Crimea he said I was the best nurse he had ever met with, whatever Aunt Tabitha may say about my masculine

tastes unfitting me for the vocations of my sex. But some women, especially old maids, are frightfully narrow-minded. Aunt Tabitha, however, so far succeeded in working on my dear gentle mother's fears, that I was prohibited doing anything beyond going to the meets and seeing the hounds draw, although I could have cried when I saw them streaming away, whilst I was obliged to turn homewards, venting my grief in bitter complaints to old Isaac, my father's groom, who had taught me to ride when I was only four years old. He sympathized in my distress with all his honest old heart, comforting me sometimes with the encouraging remark, 'Never mind, Miss Nelly! the young Captain will soon be home, and Mrs. Tabitha will be gone, perhaps, or laid up, please God, with the rheumatics—when the old cat's away the mice 'll play.' Certainly Isaac was frank in his remarks on Aunt Tabitha. I did get one or two capital days when dear old Jack was at home. He mounted me on one of his own horses, better qualified for the occasions than my own quiet little mare, Daisy, which my mother's fears, heightened by Aunt Tabitha's wicked representations, condemned me to ride. However, I solaced myself with the reflections that before the next hunting season, and in the absence of Aunt Tabitha, I should coax my father into the fulfilment of a half promise that he had made of reserving Daisy for himself as a covert hack, and buying something for me that would go.

On this particular morning my spirits were below zero. I had managed to coax the reluctant Bob into a promise of accompanying me to a coursing match at Hurstley, where we were to meet Charlie and Minnie Curzon—the latter my especial friend; and now this tiresome rain had come to spoil my promised pleasure, for Aunt Tabitha would talk all kinds of nonsense to my mother about my increasing my cold. So I was disposed to look dependently at life in general, and to wonder when my tide of good fortune was coming. My maid chirped a series of well-

meant but ineffectual consolations, and I descended to the breakfast-room in no very enviable frame of mind—only just in time for prayers.

'Late, my darling!' observed my father, cheerily.

'In my young days I was obliged to be down earlier,' Aunt Tabitha found time to remark, before she assumed a devotional attitude.

I am free to confess that my thoughts wandered sadly that morning during the progress of family prayers. I thought how disagreeable Aunt Tabitha was; and I wondered if Minnie Curzon had some equally aggravating relative always at hand to add fuel to her particular little flame of the moment. Why is it that when one is slightly put out every little circumstance should tend to jar peculiarly on one's nerves, as if directed purposely and offensively towards one's self? As I rose from my knees I felt unaccountably irritated by the slow, measured exit of poor inoffensive Mrs. Benson the housekeeper, marshalling her force out of the room; and the creaking of Framp-ton's boots excited a most unreasonable feeling of annoyance in my mind, very much increased by Bob's remark—

'I say, Nelly, it's no go, you know, to-day,' and my mother's gentle addition—

'No, darling, you cannot possibly go to Hurstley to-day.'

My father looked up from a letter he was reading, 'Never mind, my Nell; here's something that will make up for the loss of the coursing match to-day.'

'I am sorry to think that Eleanor should care for amusements so unsuitable for a woman,' remarked Aunt Tabitha; but the rebuke passed unheeded.

'What is it papa, darling?' I asked breathlessly.

'Lord and Lady Copplestone want me to take you to Burton on Wednesday, as they have a large party staying with them for the ball on Thursday. Treherne's first meet is on that day also, so you are in luck, Nell. Your mother can't go, as your uncle and aunt will be here on Wednesday.'

Even the presence of Aunt Tabitha did not restrain me from throwing my arms round my father's neck in the first impulse of my delight. It will appear, perhaps, inexplicable to many fashionable young ladies of my own age, that anything so very commonplace as an invitation to stay in a country house for a country ball should have called forth such an exuberance of joy on my part. I must therefore explain that since my first appearance as a young lady, come out some few months since, I had only been to one ball. Lord and Lady Copplestone were very old friends of my father and mother, and I had frequently spent many a pleasant week at Burton; but these visits had been always timed when their party was confined to the family circle. It is true that Lady Copplestone had often pressed my mother to allow me to go there when the house had been filled for the shooting season, or for some particular occasion of festivity; but my mother had invariably refused while I was yet in the school-room. Now the case was altered, and the interdiction removed. My mother's kind face beamed with pleasure at my evident delight, and even Aunt Tabitha's wore a look of satisfaction, I thought.

'I say, Nelly,' suddenly observed my youthful brother, suspending the absorbing occupation of eating to make the remark, 'what a sell it will be for you if nobody asks you to dance at the ball!'

My father laughed. 'What makes you think Nelly won't be asked, Bob?'

'I don't know,' rejoined Bob; 'but what a pity you are not like Nancy Coles, Nelly.'

Nancy Coles, be it observed, was the daughter of one of the under-gardeners—a good-natured young woman of Dutch build and fashion, whose round red cheeks and merry black eyes had apparently captivated Bob's fancy, for he continued—

'What a great pity you haven't got nice red cheeks like Nancy's. Yours are only pink; and my gracious! your hair isn't half as pretty as hers. She's got beautiful long black

ringlets, like corkscrews, and yours is only wavy. You should just see hers all down her back!'

'And pray, Bob, when have you had an opportunity of seeing this splendid crop of hair all down her back?' asked my father, much amused.

'I saw it the other morning, when I would go and look for the apples in her room, and she was doing her hair. Isn't she a stunning, good-natured girl, that's all! She gave me six apples, and promised me six more if I would give her a kiss.'

'You are a precious young gentleman for ten years old, certainly,' said my father. 'So that's your style of beauty, eh, Bob?—red cheeks and corkscrew ringlets!'

Aunt Tabitha, however, did not enter into the joke. She cast a look of withering scorn on the top of Bob's unconscious head, who had returned with unabated vigour to his breakfast.

'Really, my dear John, I wonder how you can encourage Robert (Aunt Tabitha rarely condescended to the more familiar abbreviations of our names) in associating with such low people. They are very respectable, honest persons, the Coles's, no doubt; but, certainly, Nancy is not a fitting companion for Robert. A young woman who keeps apples in her bedroom, too; dirty creature!' added my aunt in a tone of unaffected horror.

'She isn't a dirty creature,' cried Bob, flying valiantly to the defence of his favourite; 'she's a nice, clean girl! And as to keeping apples in her room, why they give a beautiful smell to her things. I like the smell of apples.' At which additional proof of Bob's very unrefined taste, Aunt Tabitha looked mutely disgusted.

'And so Bob thinks you will get no partners at the ball, eh, Nelly?' said my father, taking my face in his hands as I passed his chair. 'Well, we shall see. Mind you take your habit with you; old Copplestone means to give you a mount. Here's a particular message for you in the postscript.'

I looked over his shoulder and read, 'Tell my friend Nelly I am

going to give her a mount on Thursday.' My father gave a sly wink in the direction of Aunt Tabitha, which note of observation I did not fail to understand, and flew up-stairs to give orders to Margaret.

'Well, to be sure, miss,' remarked that practical little personage, 'how fortunate that your new ball-dress is just come down from London; and such a love of a dress as it is too! And there's your white silk grenadine with carise just finished. And, dear me, miss, what a pity there's no time to send for a wreath of York and Lancaster roses to wear with it.'

'Never mind that, Margaret, there's oceans of red and white camelias at Coppelstone, and the gardener will give you as many as you like. But let me look at my new habit, I hope that is all right. For goodness' sake let me try it on.'

'Well, miss, I can't see that your habit matters as much as your dresses,' returned Margaret, contemptuously, who being a mortal coward herself, held a different opinion on this subject.

'A thousand times more, Margaret,' I said, as I anxiously prepared to try on my habit—my father's last and most welcome gift to me. It was an unworthy distrust of the unrivalled powers of that master-genius Poole. A microscope could not have brought to view one superfluous fold or crease; and with a sigh of intense relief and satisfaction I bade Margaret take especial care in packing it.

Wednesday morning came in clear and bright, and at one o'clock punctually the carriage came to convey us to the station. The last thing I saw as we drove away was my poor little darling terrier in the hands of that naughty mischievous Bob, who was teaching him an impossible trick of standing like a clown on his fore paws. The little treasure's look of mournful entreaty haunted me until we reached the station; but there the bustle and the added excitement caused by that foolish Margaret being very nearly left behind on the platform, banished all other recollections from my mind.

I wonder if any one else is tor-

mented by a maid who is never up to time in travelling, and who goes through the successive stages of perplexity and anguish until the luggage under her charge is forcibly wrested from her by a guard, and her own incapable body is thrust into a carriage by another such uncompromising functionary. I have nothing else to say against Margaret; she is a good, clever little soul in every other respect, and certainly she never played me any of the inconvenient tricks which Minnie Curzon's maid occasionally indulges in, such as going to stay in a country house for a very particular ball, and leaving her mistress's ball-dress behind, or exchanging one of the most important boxes at a cross station for a travelling bagman's useless kit.

I must say I like travelling by railway. The speed with which you fly by fields, houses, villages, etc., and the roomy luxurious compartments of a first-class railway carriage, engender all kinds of pleasant dreamy reflections. And then the monotony of the journey is agreeably broken by the short stoppages at the various stations, where you are interested in watching the different passengers getting out or coming in.

We had the carriage all to ourselves until we reached Blatchford station, when, just as the bell had sounded for departure, and the train was actually moving off, a stranger rushed frantically up to the door, and was pushed head foremost into the carriage by the guard, apologising for his unceremonious entrance in a nervous, hurried way, and muttering something about his dogs, which he pronounced '*dorgs*.' He was in a very breathless state, and it was some time before he had subsided into a calmer condition. I had leisure to study attentively the person and features of our new fellow-traveller, whilst he was occupied in putting up and putting down the window on his side at least a dozen times. Most remarkable, indeed, was his general appearance. The prevailing colour of red beginning with his complexion and his hair, and terminating in a fright-

fully unbecoming necktie of the same brilliant hue, made me feel as if a ball of fire had suddenly been shot into the carriage. A coat fluctuating between white and grey, with massive gilt buttons, completed his gorgeous and very peculiar attire. A certain independence, and that indefinable something which proclaims the gentleman, proved him to be one, although a *rara avis* of his species. Presently he drew a 'Times' from his pocket, and became apparently absorbed in its perusal. Yet, from time to time, when I turned my head in his direction, I encountered the gaze of his very light blue eyes, which led me to suspect that the 'Times' served only as a cover for a counter observation on his side of his fellow-passengers. He betrayed no further signs of excitement until we had reached the last station before Burton; and then, flinging aside his paper, his rug, and other incumbrances, he called loudly to one of the guards.

'Here, let me out, will you? Now take the dorgs out, will you? Not that way, you confounded fool. Who but an idiot ever seized hold of a dorg by his ears? Here, Brown, you take them, and mind you get 'em home at once, and wash Pluto's eyes with warm water. I don't know what the deuce is the matter with them.'

These last directions were addressed to a man looking like a game-keeper, who touched his hat in reply, and led off the 'dorgs'—valuable animals, no doubt, as they were objects of such intense solicitude to their master, but in my humble estimation a miserable looking set.

Lord Copplestone's carriage was waiting at the station for us, and a dog-cart as well, into which I saw our impetuous fellow-traveller mount as we drove off.

'Papa, who can that strange looking man be?' I asked. 'He is going to Burton, I am sure, for that is Lord Copplestone's groom with the dog-cart.'

My father laughed. 'Why that is Thornhill. I have never seen him since he was a boy. He has

only lately come to live at his place near here, as he has a very large property in Hampshire. I hear he is one of the queerest men in existence, but a good fellow and immensely rich.'

Burton Park is one of the show-places of the county. It stands in a very fine park, with magnificent timber and cedars innumerable. The house appears to me to be of no very defined architecture, but it is very grand and imposing—an immense pile of building cased in Bath stone. The interior is equally splendid—a long suite of beautiful rooms, with a staircase of pure white marble, of palatial size and beauty; and all belonging to the best and mildest host and hostess in the world.

It was nearly five o'clock when we reached Burton. Lady Copplestone was in the library when we were announced.

'My dear child, how glad I am to see you,' she exclaimed, as she kissed me affectionately, and then introduced me to some other people in the room. After I had answered her numerous inquiries for my mother, Aunt Tabitha, Bob, and all my belongings, she left me to go and talk to my father; and whilst I drank my cup of tea, I scrutinized the other occupants of the room. First, my glance rested on a very pretty woman seated in a low chair opposite to me, and whom Lady Copplestone had called Mrs. Singleton. She was exquisitely fair, with large blue eyes, delicate features, and rippling golden hair, which her dress of dark-blue velvet set off to perfection. She was a very dainty-looking little person, small and mignonne, like a Dresden shepherdess; but as I looked at her, there was a something in the expression of her face which I did not like—a half satirical, faithless look in her blue eyes, that impressed me unpleasantly. She kept those same blue eyes fixed on me, eyeing me from head to foot, and an uncomfortable sensation crept over me during this unflinching scrutiny. A very tall young man was standing, or rather leaning, nonchalantly against the corner of the mantelpiece, near her. He was slightly

and gracefully built, with a face fair as a woman's, and almost as effeminate. A long light moustache, curling hair, and very long, drooping whiskers, formed a kind of framework to his very delicate countenance, the prevailing expression of which was a languid disdain of everything in the world but himself. When Lady Copplestone had introduced him to me as Lord Edward Karr, he had acknowledged the ceremony by slightly raising his eyebrows, and honouring me with a fixed stare from his half-closed eyes. He was evidently a very great swell in his own estimation; and if intense conceit, and an immense share of self-confidence, go to make up the requirements necessary for the manufacture of a swell, he was not far wrong in his calculations.

Presently Mrs. Singleton raised herself from her recumbent attitude, and began a conversation with me, as follows:—

'Are you fond of dancing, Miss Vavasour?'

'Yes, I am very fond of it.'

'Do you ride?'

'Yes, I ride.'

'Have you brought your horse? Perhaps you do not intend going to the meet to-morrow?'

'Yes, I hope to go, as Lord Copplestone is going to give me a mount on one of his horses.'

'Oh, indeed!' (with a shade of superciliousness in her tone which at once aroused a feeling of resentment in my mind.) 'Are you going to ride his grey pony?'

Conquering my shyness: 'No, not his grey pony. I never ride a pony, if I can possibly help it.'

'You are ambitious, I see,' with an aggravating smile. At this juncture Lord Edward Karr roused himself to observe, in a languid tone, addressing Mrs. Singleton, but talking at me—

'What a pity it is that the race of young ladies should so misplace their ambition as to allow it to lead them into places where they are only in the way, and where their presence is a great bore. If a woman can ride, as you can, Mrs. Singleton, and as very few do, then by all means let them indulge the

bent of their inclinations; but I should like to frame a new law, by which all young ladies should be interdicted from getting in peoples' way in a hunting field, where their absence is more acceptable than their company.'

Mrs. Singleton smiled, but I sat boiling over with indignation at this unprovoked attack. It was fortunate that Lady Copplestone asked me to go upstairs at this moment, or I do not know what I should have said or done.

As we crossed the hall, Lord Copplestone met us. I had always been an especial pet of his. Many a time during the course of my life had he obtained for me immunities from school-room discipline, even in defiance of Aunt Tabitha, and had always stood my friend in need.

'Well, Nelly, my dear, let me look at you,' he exclaimed, in his jovial manner, after having kissed me on both sides of my face, after the fashion of other days. 'Well, upon my word, you are blooming. How many hearts do you intend to break, I should like to know?'

'None that I know of,' I replied, laughing; 'but, Lord Copplestone, I have something to ask you.'

'Oh, if you are going to tell secrets, I shall leave you two to yourselves,' said Lady Copplestone. 'You know your way to the blue-room, in the east gallery, Nelly, so you can go there when you like.' And she left us.

'What is it, you little witch?' asked Lord Copplestone; 'some mischief?'

'What am I to ride to-morrow?' I asked, breathlessly.

'Oh, that's it, is it? Well, there's Skylark for you, Nelly. I know you can ride: you would not be your father's daughter if you could not; and Skylark is not fit for any one who can't ride, I can tell you; but you are not afraid?'

'Oh, no!' I answered, boldly, forgetting all other considerations in my intense desire of proving to those two impertinent people I had left in the library that I could ride, which was a fact they evidently doubted.

'That is all settled then, Nelly,'

said Lord Copplestone, who was always pleased to indulge me on any terms. 'Now you shall give me a kiss for that.'

'I will give you as many as you please,' I replied, laughing. And after submitting to another hearty salute, I ran up the stairs, on my way to the blue-room in the east gallery.

I dare say Margaret wondered what possible cause there could be for my long fit of abstraction during the progress of my toilette, with the most becoming of dresses stretched out before me on the bed, and clusters of bright camelias arranged by her skilful hands for my adornment. The fact was, my state of mind bore a close resemblance to that of a person who had rashly embarked on an enterprise far beyond his qualifications and power of accomplishment. I knew perfectly well what kind of animal was Skylark—a first-class hunter, with a first-class spirit into the bargain. Still fresh in my memory was a certain fierce struggle between him and Lord Copplestone's groom on a memorable occasion when I had gone out on the gray pony to see an otter hunt. It is true that I had only spoken truthfully at the moment when I told Lord Copplestone that I was not afraid, but that it was a daring attempt I could not conceal from myself. My own quiet Daisy at home was not exactly a fitting preparation for a ride across country on Skylark. I had, as I have already observed, been out once or twice with Jack, and he had said that I had taken my fences gallantly, and 'could go;' but then it was an easy country, and Jack had mounted me on his quietest horse, Morning Star, which I had often ridden. I knew enough of hunting to appreciate the difference existing between a long stretch of the open, and enclosures with very stiff impediments, which I had actually undertaken to ride over on a horse beyond my powers of control. I went over all the difficulties to which I had committed myself; but '*Mittare vel timere sperno*' is the motto of the Vavasours, and I never once faltered in my purpose. Had I indeed been inclined to do so,

Mrs. Singleton's mocking smile, and that impertinent man's rudeness, would have been sufficient incentives to daring anything. My father always said that I had the seat for hunting, square and firm; and Jack has complimented me more than once on my 'light hand.' To these and the good favour of fortune I commended myself.

I cut short Margaret's incessant chatter about the 'quantity of grand folks' staying in the house, by abruptly asking her what horse Mrs. Singleton was going to ride to-morrow, forgetting that I might as well have inquired of the little goose where the hounds were to meet on the following morning.

'Lor, miss! I don't know, I'm sure; but I can tell you her maid showed me such a lot of lovely dresses, and she's going to wear at the ball a——'

'Never mind her dresses, Margaret,' I interrupted, impatiently. 'Tell Isaac I must see him this evening; there will be no one in the billiard-room after dinner, and I must see him, mind, Margaret.'

'There, miss! you do look nice, that's certain,' exclaimed Margaret, triumphantly, as she put the finishing touch to my dress; 'but I don't suppose you care for anything besides hunting and riding.'

Margaret was mistaken, however. I am not at all above those frivolities and vanities which Aunt Tabitha sometimes expatiates on. I maintain that there is no harm in wishing to look as well as you can, and that the fact of being well dressed is an immense advantage. It has, in my opinion, a moral effect also on the person, so to speak. If once you feel confident that your get-up defies criticism, you cease to think about yourself, and are free to enjoy, in an honest and unconcerned way, what is going on around you. But admit the painful consciousness of ill-assorted colours, badly-fitting gloves, or an unbecoming dress, and you are at once a victim to all kinds of torturing imaginations, together with the conviction that your unfortunate appearance serves as an object for the condemnatory remarks of every one in the room.

Yes! the cerise and white dress was a perfect success, and Margaret had placed the camellias in my hair with a taste worthy of fairy fingers. Jack says I have the Irish combination of violet eyes and dark hair. I hope I am not vain, but I confess to a thrill of gratification as I surveyed myself in the pier-glass, and for the moment Mrs. Singleton, Lord Edward Karr, and Skylark were forgotten.

I met my father on the stairs as I went down.

'Well, upon my word, Nelly,' he said, 'I don't know if you won't cut out Nancy Coles.'

'Am I all right, papa?'

'You are certainly not all wrong, Nelly,' he answered, laughing, but in a tone of complete satisfaction.

'Papa,' I said, thinking it best to break the subject suddenly to him, 'I am going to ride Skylark to-morrow.'

'The deuce you are, Nelly,' he replied, in rather a startled tone.

'Yes, darling. Now don't you say a word against it, please. I am not a bit afraid; you know I can ride; and I have a particular wish to ride Skylark to-morrow.'

It is necessary to observe that a pet weakness of my father is the belief that I can accomplish anything that I wish to do. It is true that he often succumbs to objections raised by Aunt Tabitha, who has the wit to make my dear, gentle mother (whose wishes no one ever dreams of opposing) the mouth-piece of her absurd scruples; but it is not from any shaken conviction on his part that my father gives in. Luckily I now had the field to myself; my father only looked a little grave.

'Papa, that Mrs. Singleton proposed my riding the grey pony—fancy that! and as to Lord Edward Karr, you should have heard how contemptuously he spoke about my going out to-morrow.'

My father laughed, and rubbed his hands.

'Ah, I see it now! So you wish to prove to them that even Skylark is not beyond your deserts. Well, Nelly, recollect I exact one promise, that if you find he is more un-

manageable than you think now, you will return.'

'Very well, papa,' I replied, dutifully; and I thought, 'How in the world can I redeem that promise, when I already know he is too much for me?'

Our railway friend, Mr. Thornhill, was standing near the door when we entered the drawing-room, which was full of people. His costume of the morning had struck me as being strange in the extreme, but his appearance now was, if possible, more striking. All light and no shadow will, perhaps, best express my sense of its general effect. The figures of Noah and his three sons in a child's toy ark recurred to my mind as I looked at him. Mr. Thornhill spoke to my father, with whom I supposed he had previously renewed his acquaintance, and then, in spasmodic accents, requested an introduction to myself. He was so very extraordinary that I confess to a recoil from his advances, and gladly availed myself of a vacant seat on the sofa by Lady Copplestone. There were some people staying in the house whom I knew, and many who were strangers to me. There appeared to be only two girls of the party besides myself—the Miss Veres; the eldest a very tall, handsome, fair girl, with rather a forbidding turn of countenance; the youngest a small, sparkling brunette, with large, laughing eyes, and a very pretty face.

Mrs. Singleton certainly knew how to dress. She was looking like a naiad, in a pale green dress, covered with rich, white lace, and water lilies in her soft, golden hair. She had a pretty, childish manner, which was very attractive; especially so, I should say, to the male creation, who, I observe, can be decoyed into the most servile submission to any caprice of the weaker sex, provided only it be seasoned delicately by an implied compliment to their superior powers, or to their superior something. So blindly and happily vain are our lords of creation! Mrs. Singleton was, I believe, a perfect mistress of this art. She rode the devotion of her admirers with a light hand, know-

ing how to use the curb when required. At the present moment she was talking and laughing merrily (making no end of pretty pantomimic gestures with her tiny hands) to a gentleman, who was evidently listening to her with an amused expression on his face, such as the prattle of a lovely child would call up. He was a tall—very tall—man, about thirty, with no remarkable points of beauty in his face; and yet there was a something in the countenance which was ten times more attractive than mere positive personal beauty—an expression of power and frankness which impressed you at once in his favour; and in addition to this was the prevailing look he had of being ‘thoroughbred all through.’

I did not hear what he was saying in reply to Mrs. Singleton, but I could see that his manner had that happy blending of gentle courtesy and honest cordiality which must have been appreciated by his fair companion in common with most people. Lord Edward Karr was ensconced in the depths of an easy-chair, studying ‘The Times,’ and unconscious, I should say, of every passing event. When dinner was announced, he rose indolently, stroked his silky moustache, and looked in the direction of Mrs. Singleton, intending, I imagined, to take her in to dinner; but, if so, his aim was frustrated by his tardy movements, for the little lady glided by him with some one else, and in answer to some remark he made as she passed him, nodded gaily, as if in acquiescence. I thought he would have paired off in the first flight; but no, he seemed too lazy to obey any such law of precedence; or, as I afterwards had reason to think, he had some sinister motive for declining to do so. When my turn came, he walked up to me, and said, coolly, ‘I believe I must take you in, Miss Vavasour.’ I longed to tell him that I should infinitely have preferred being handed in to dinner by the butler; but there are some things you can’t say, although the repression of them nearly suffocates you. When we arrived in the dining-room, I saw Lord Edward

take a rapid survey of the room, and we finally subsided into chairs flanked on *his* side by Mrs. Singleton; and the meaning of his taking *me* in to dinner was at once explained. To any older or married person he would have been obliged to talk and make himself decently agreeable. He apparently considered that I should not require this form of civility. So far his manoeuvre had been successful, and I, of course, was grateful accordingly. To my increased annoyance, who should find his way to the vacant chair on my side but Mr. Thornhill. He came in by himself, so I had the pleasing anticipation of dividing his attention with his dinner, my only consolation being that at all events he would redeem me from the unpleasant position of being left to my own reflections during the long course of a dinner, where every one else was talking or being talked to. Mr. Thornhill settled himself in his chair with the square determination of a man who is going to enjoy himself and his dinner.

‘So, you see, here we are again, Miss Vavasour,’ he began, with a short laugh, the usual preface to his remarks. ‘Knew your pa again directly. Not seen him for years; never since I was a small boy in jackets and frills; odd, isn’t it?’

I answered ‘very odd;’ and I thought what an odious little boy he must have been in jackets and frills.

‘Fond of dorgs, Miss Vavasour? Did you happen to remark mine this afternoon? very fine pointers, eh? Happy to give you one of Juno’s puppies, if you like.’

I expressed myself much obliged, but I declined the offer of the puppy. My interlocutor sat silent for a few minutes during the discussion of his soup and fish. Happily for me, he was all for one thing at a time. Presently, however, he began again.

‘Fond of croquet, Miss Vavasour? Of course you are; all young ladies play croquet. I’m not a bad hand at it myself. Not pleasant, though, if you chance to give your foot a crack instead of the ball, particularly when you happen to have you

know what on one side of it.' Of course the wretch meant a corn, and actually had the audacity to add, lowering his tone confidentially, 'But I can tell you such a famous remedy for that. Why, hang it! I've cured half a dozen people. A bad thing to have for croquet, you know.'

'This is a pleasant position,' I mentally observed, 'being seated between a fop and a fool.' I endeavoured to lead Mr. Thornhill's thoughts in a more congenial direction by remarking the flowers on the table.

'Yes, beautiful roses, ain't they? Will you come over and see my gardens at Newton Towers, Miss Vavasour, and the conservatory? I'm very partial to violets. These are very fine ones,' alluding to a very large bunch of double violets he wore in his buttonhole.

'Yes, they are,' I replied; 'I am very fond of those Russian violets.'

'Are you? Oh, then, do have these.' And Mr. Thornhill began to tear the flowers out of his coat, into which they were fastened so successfully that his exertions to remove them drew upon me the first languid notice from Lord Edward Karr, who had hitherto been engrossed in his conversation with Mrs. Singleton.

'Pray, Miss Vavasour, don't let that poor fellow tear himself to pieces. It is quite distressing to see him; you young ladies have no compassion.'

I could not help smiling, for, in fact, my energetic neighbour's efforts promised fair to do some grievous damage to himself. Another wrench, however, was successful, and he laid the violets in triumph by my plate. 'There, Miss Vavasour; they're sweet, ain't they? and, upon my word, they are exactly the shade of your eyes.'

'Your friend is poetical in his expressions,' remarked Lord Edward on the other side, to which I vouchsafed no reply.

Mr. Thornhill became again engrossed by his dinner, and Lord Edward resumed his conversation with Mrs. Singleton, affording me no interval of suspense to make a

single observation, had I been so inclined, which I was not. It is possible that some compunctions may have visited his languid lordship's mind, for towards the end of the second course he commenced a kind of catechism, to the following effect:—

'I suppose you are looking forward with great pleasure to the ball to-morrow?'

'Yes! Are you?' in a tone of innocent inquiry.

'Me!' in a tone of slight disdain, at the plebeian notion of enjoying a country ball. 'It will be amusing, I dare say. Country balls are always diverting. People seem to make such a business of dancing; and the young ladies go at it with such good will. It is quite astonishing. Country balls are a bore, too, for you are expected to ask people to dance.'

'That must be a bore, certainly; but are you quite sure that such a sacrifice is expected from you?'

'I am afraid it is an objectionable necessity.'

'I think it quite possible that you may be mistaken in your sense of duty on that point, and that the young ladies do not dream of such a condescension on your part. I certainly cannot answer for *them*; but judging from my own very limited experience of London men, I should say that country young ladies would rather they should follow the bent of their inclinations than the dictates of their polite scruples.'

'Oh, indeed! May I ask what has led you to a conclusion so unflattering to them?'

'Why the very apparent fact that they—the London men I mean—are too apt to mistake impertinence for wit, and the most absurd conceit for refinement of manners, I suppose.'

'Dear me! Your experience must have been unfortunate, Miss Vavasour.'

'Well, perhaps it has; and certainly it is not quite fair to judge of the many by the solitary exceptions.'

'And pray, then, have you met with this solitary exception?'

'I do not see why I should answer the question; but I have no objec-

tion to gratify your curiosity, if you particularly wish it.'

'Yes, I am anxious to hear.'

'Well, then, in this very house I have met with this exception.'

'Since your arrival to-day?'

'Yes, since my arrival here to-day.'

'How very amusing! Do you know many London men?'

'I only know one in this house, unless my other neighbour is a London man.'

With a look of supreme contempt at the unconscious Mr. Thornhill, 'I should call him a farmer. Who is the other you allude to?'

'I wonder you ask the question.'

'You are certainly most complimentary, Miss Vavasour. Now I suppose I ought to be overcome with confusion at your rebuke.'

His coolness almost exasperated me, but I replied carelessly—

'Don't imagine so for a moment.

A man who has the audacity to be uncivil to a lady can never have the grace to appear confused.' And with this concluding remark I turned my shoulder upon him, but not before I had seen a look in his face which satisfied me that the last hit had told.

I presumed that Mr. Thornhill had overheard a portion of our conversation, for he said, in a low tone, 'Bravo, Miss Vavasour, you gave it him then in fine style—cut him down. He won't try that on again in a hurry. I do admire pluck.'

I was silent, for I did not at all care to enlighten Mr. Thornhill on the subject; but I felt a certain satisfaction in the belief that Lord Edward Karr would know in future that country young ladies are not so incapable of self-defence as he had imagined them to be.

Before we left the dinner-table he had, however, the effrontery to hazard a second attempt at conversation. 'I

'Do you like dinner-parties, Miss Vavasour? have you enjoyed this one, for instance?'

'Do you mean,' I asked, not appearing to understand him, 'whether I like my turbot, and venison, and champagne? yes, very much indeed. I was very hungry when I sat down to dinner.'

Lord Edward looked at me suspiciously; he was beginning to distrust me; I saw that.

'That was not precisely my meaning, Miss Vavasour.'

'I suppose the enjoyment of a dinner party in another sense depends very much on the people, or rather on the person who takes you in to dinner; of course, therefore, I was not so foolish as to indulge in the vain expectation that mine would be a pleasant one to-night, consequently I am not disappointed.'

The ladies were moving out of the room as I said this deliberately; and as I followed them, I felt that this time I had the best of it.

I knew that Isaac would be waiting for me in the billiard-room, so I managed to slip away there unperceived instead of going into the drawing-room. There he was, true to his appointment.

'Did you want me, Miss Nelly?' he asked. 'I've been a fearing that some of the quality would be coming in, and a finding me here, so I kept nigh the door, for what should I have told them, Miss Nelly?'

'That you were waiting for me, Isaac. And now this is what I want you for: I am going out to-morrow with the hounds.'

'And what be you going to ride, Miss Nelly, then? You can't have your pa's hack, for he's gone and hurted his foot, drat him!'

'I don't want papa's hack, Isaac: I am going to ride Lord Copplestone's hunter, Skylark.'

Isaac opened his eyes, speechless with amazement. 'Why what be you a thinking of now, Miss Nelly?' he at last ejaculated.

Isaac, of course, would make objections, I knew that beforehand; but I was prepared to overcome them. 'I am going to ride Skylark, Isaac. Papa knows it, so why do you look so astonished?'

'Why, Miss Nelly, he aint fit for you to ride; not that I've anything to say against the horse—he's a splendid one, that's sure; but you couldn't hold him, and then you'd get frightened, and there'd be a smasher.'

'Don't talk nonsense, Isaac; I can hold him, and I shall not be

frightened or have a smasher, as you call it, which means, I suppose, a fall. You taught me to ride, recollect, Isaac.' This last observation touched Isaac's *amour propre*, as I intended it should do.

'Well, and so I did teach you, Miss Nelly; and though I says it who shouldn't, I've been and taught you properly. Maybe you could ride Skylark; you're a good hand, and plenty of pluck—but, mind you, pluck aint everything. And if you should get a banging big fall, what's your pa and me to say when we get home again? My stars! I can see Mrs. Tabitha—'

'I shan't get a fall, Isaac,' I replied, although I secretly felt such a contingency to be the reverse of impossible. 'And, for goodness' sake, don't talk about Aunt Tabitha now. This is what I want you to do: find out all about Skylark from Lord Copplestone's groom. It is just as well to know beforehand if he has any particular ways or tricks, that's all.'

My confident manner reassured old Isaac. There's nothing like putting a good face on a matter. If I had shown the slightest symptoms of doubt, or a trace of my own private misgivings on the subject, Isaac's own apprehensions would have increased tenfold, and his representations might have succeeded in upsetting all remaining confidence in myself. As it was his scruples were vanquished, and he subsequently confided to Margaret:—

'They're a pair on 'em—Miss Nelly and Skylark; I seed that by the devil in her eye. She's set her heart on it; and there warn't no mortal use in a-trying to turn her from it.'

Isaac and I parted with the understanding that he was to gather all necessary information concerning 'the ways' of Skylark; and I hastened back to the drawing-room. That very long half-hour after dinner is always a good opportunity for testing the respective merits and demerits of women, as they stand in relation to each other. A woman may be charming to a man—and repelling to one of her own sex.

Some ill-natured people, indeed, say that one is a necessary consequence of the other; but of course I don't agree to that heresy—at any rate there are happy exceptions, who are fascinating alike to men, women, and children. I don't think Mrs. Singleton cared to belong to this class. Certainly in the society of her own sex she seemed to collapse into a graceful muteness—only opening her pretty lips at intervals, to give utterance to some remark the reverse of good-natured. Between her and the tall Miss Vere there was evidently no love lost. The latter was one of those imperial kind of people, who never condescend to any feeling so inferior as spite, but who repay it with interest in a more straightforward manner. Her good-natured pretty little sister laughed away the effects of Miss Vere's uncompromising retorts to the treacherous purrings of Mrs. Singleton, who would say the sharpest things with the most innocent smile on her lovely childish face. I liked the Veres; but there was a charming Mrs. Forbes of the party, to whom I felt even more attached. She was a bright, joyous, loveable-looking woman, with a piquancy in her manner and tone of voice, and a kind frank way of speaking, which were very taking. There was a slight dash of independence and decision in everything she said and did, accompanied by the most perfect tact; and the result of this happy combination was the power of always saying the right thing at the right time—not the prompting of diplomatic motives, but a welling up from the productive sources of a well-bred nature and a kind heart. We soon became better acquainted; and by the time the gentlemen came in from their wine we were rapidly progressing into a declared friendship. She told me the names of the people I did not know. 'That is my husband, my dear,' she said, in reply to my inquiry who a very tall, elderly, distinguished-looking man was. 'I was engaged to him, I believe, when I was ten years old, and he did me the honour to wait for me until I was eighteen. We have been married ten years; and I



Drawn by M. Ellen Edwards.]

"That very long half-hour after dinner is always a good opportunity for testing the respective merits and demerits of women, as they stand in relation to each other."

[See "A Fast Run and a Double Kill: a Tale of the Field and the Drawing Room."

have never repented *that* step, although there is a difference of five-and-twenty years between us. I should not have done as the wife of a young man—I'm too fond of having my own way. That man talking to General Forbes is Sir Hugh Stracey. Ah! he is a nice fellow—and I can tell you he passed some very complimentary remarks on a certain young lady sitting opposite to us at dinner. By the way, he said he knew your brother very well;—you have a brother in the Guards, haven't you? Sir Hugh was in them, in the Crimea, but he has left the army now.

As she spoke, the same man whom I had observed talking to Miss Singleton before dinner, came up to us.

'Now I know you are talking scandal, Mrs. Forbes; so I am come to put a stop to it. Perhaps you will kindly introduce me to Miss Vavasour.'

'I was just abusing you, Sir Hugh,' returned Mrs. Forbes, laughing; 'so you must make your complaints to Miss Vavasour, and try to redeem your character. Allow me, my dear, to introduce Sir Hugh Stracey. And as she went going to talk to someone else, Sir Hugh took possession of her vacant seat.

'I should have known you were where, Miss Vavasour,' he said, 'from your likeness to my dear Jack. Has that peridious fellow never mentioned my name to you?—We are old cronies.'

'Oh yes, often,' I replied. And indeed I was well aware that this same Sir Hugh Stracey had helped Jack out of one or two scrapes, when, had it not been for this friend in need, of whom poor Jack had spoken in warmest terms of gratitude, more serious results might have ensued.

'Jack of course is many years my junior; but that didn't prevent our being fast friends. I have not caught sight of him for the last two years.'

Sir Hugh Stracey was one of those people who have an easy, pleasant way of talking, which smooths away all the usual tiresome preliminaries of making acquaintance; and in a very short time—

thanks in a measure to Jack, who had been our starting-point—I found myself conversing as unreservedly as if I had known him for years. He seemed to know all about my belongings; even Aunt Tabitha was an old acquaintance, by reputation. That wicked Jack must have set him in to no end of family secrets!

'What was it you and Karr were discussing at dinner, Miss Vavasour?' asked Sir Hugh, presently. 'You looked quite excited about something, and Karr appeared more animated than usual; which is all the more wonderful, as he is said to have made a rule of never talking to young ladies—of old ones, I believe.'

'It was pity, then, that he thought fit to transgress his rule to-night?' I replied, growing less aware at the recollection of the dinner.

'Why?' asked Sir Hugh.

'Because the experiment was an unsuccessful one. Don't, please, talk about Lord Edward Karr. In the first place, I don't like him; and, secondly, as I really scarcely know him, I might be unfair.'

'You are very just, Miss Vavasour, at any rate; but I should like to know why you don't like him—do tell me.'

'I think he is very cool, and very unassuming.'

'Cool, perhaps, in a sense rather than another, as a man conversant.'

'Do they?' Well, perhaps I have not mixed enough in the world to acquire that taste.

'Karr is, they say, very popular in general. At all events you will allow that he is a good-looking fellow—and good looks carry some weight, don't they?'

'Very possibly; but I don't admire Lord Edward's good looks—they are too effeminate.'

'Poor Karr! his effeminacy ends there. I must say that in common justice to him, Miss Vavasour, there was no more daring rider in the charge of Balaklava than Karr—'

'Did he ride at Balaklava?' I asked, struck by an involuntary respect when I heard this.

'Ah! I see you confess to hero-worship like all women,' observed



Drawn by M. Ellen Edwards.]

"That very long half-hour after dinner is always a good opportunity for testing the respective merits and demerits of women, as they stand in relation to each other."

[See "A Fast Run and a Double Kill; a Tale of the Field and the Drawing Room."

have never repented *that* step, although there is a difference of five-and-twenty years between us. I should not have done as the wife of a young man—I'm too fond of having my own way. That man talking to General Forbes is Sir Hugh Stracey. Ah! he is a nice fellow—and I can tell you he passed some very complimentary remarks on a certain young lady sitting opposite to us at dinner. By the way, he said he knew your brother very well;—you have a brother in the Guards, haven't you? Sir Hugh was in them, in the Crimea, but he has left the army now.'

As she spoke, the same man whom I had observed talking to Mrs. Singleton before dinner, came up to us.

'Now I know you are talking scandal, Mrs. Forbes; so I am come to put a stop to it. Perhaps you will kindly introduce me to Miss Vavasour.'

'I was just abusing you, Sir Hugh,' returned Mrs. Forbes, laughing; 'so you must make your complaints to Miss Vavasour, and try to redeem your character. Allow me, my dear, to introduce Sir Hugh Stracey.' And as she went away to talk to someone else, Sir Hugh took possession of her vacant seat.

'I should have known you anywhere, Miss Vavasour,' he said, 'from your likeness to my friend Jack. Has that perfidious fellow never mentioned my name to you?—We are old cronies.'

'Oh yes, often,' I replied. And indeed I was well aware that this same Sir Hugh Stracey had helped Jack out of one or two scrapes, when, had it not been for this friend in need, of whom poor Jack had spoken in warmest terms of gratitude, more serious results might have ensued.

'Jack of course is many years my junior; but that didn't prevent our being fast friends. I have not caught sight of him for the last two years.'

Sir Hugh Stracey was one of those people who have an easy, pleasant way of talking, which smooths away all the usual tiresome preliminaries of making acquaintance; and in a very short time—

thanks in a measure to Jack, who had been our starting-point—I found myself conversing as unrestrainedly as if I had known him for years. He seemed to know all about my belongings: even Aunt Tabitha was an old acquaintance, by reputation. That wicked Jack must have let him in to no end of family secrets!

'What was it you and Karr were discussing at dinner, Miss Vavasour?' asked Sir Hugh, presently. 'You looked quite excited about something, and Karr appeared more animated than usual; which is all the more wonderful, as he is said to have made a rule of never talking to young ladies—afraid of them, I believe.'

'It is a pity, then, that he thought fit to transgress his rule to-night,' I replied, growing hot again at the recollection of the dinner.

'Why?' asked Sir Hugh.

'Because the experiment was an unsuccessful one. Don't, please, talk about Lord Edward Karr. In the first place, I don't like him; and, secondly, as I really scarcely know him, I might be unfair.'

'You are very just, Miss Vavasour, at any rate; but I should like to know why you don't like him—do tell me.'

'I think he is very cool, and very conceited.'

'But I thought all women rather liked conceit in a man sometimes.'

'Do they? Well, perhaps I have not mixed enough in the world to acquire that taste.'

'Karr is, they say, very popular in general. At all events you will allow that he is a good-looking fellow—and good looks carry some weight, don't they?'

'Very possibly; but I don't admire Lord Edward's good looks—they are too effeminate.'

'Poor Karr! his effeminacy ends there. I must say that in common justice to him, Miss Vavasour, there was no more daring rider in the charge of Balaklava than Karr—'

'Did he ride at Balaklava?' I asked, struck by an involuntary respect when I heard this.

'Ah! I see you confess to hero-worship like all women,' observed

Sir Hugh, laughing. 'You will like Karr better after that, and forgive him his conceit.'

'No,' I answered resolutely. 'I hate conceit; but I do think better of him in that one respect you mention—for I admire courage and daring; and I am glad to find that Lord Edward Karr can do something better than—'

'Than what? Do go on with what you were going to say,' said Sir Hugh, as I checked myself, not feeling inclined to repeat the conversation which had offended me. 'You won't tell me—ah! I shall find it out then. Karr must have done something very flagrant, for I am certain you are a very indulgent person, Miss Vavasour.'

'Not when I am offended,' I replied, laughing: 'so I warn you not to try.'

'I want you to come and play a round game,' said the pleading voice of Mrs. Singleton, as she glided up to Sir Hugh. 'Come and bank with me.'

'Not for worlds, Mrs. Singleton. I hate all round games; and not even the alluring prospect of banking with you can tempt me; although I feel sure it would lead me on to fortune. You must not ask Miss Vavasour—she never plays cards on principle, and hates them as much as I do.'

The same smile which had before offended me crossed Mrs. Singleton's face. 'I am rejoiced to find that your tastes agree so well,' she retorted, as she moved away.

I passed a very pleasant evening, and as I went to my room, I thought how glad Jack would be to hear that I had met his friend Sir Hugh Stracey.

It was a bright November morning. The light mists were rolling away under the influence of the brilliant sunshine; and when I opened my window the sweet air came into the room sharpened by the slight white frost, which still lingered on the broad surface of the park. I have often heard Jack say that such a morning, with anticipation of 'good scent,' a first-rate horse, and 'a crack pack of hounds,'

were sufficient to make a man wish that 'this world would last for ever.' Now all these advantages were mine; but an undercurrent of very mixed feelings debarred me from appreciating them as keenly as Jack would have done.

Not many of the party were assembled when I entered the breakfast-room. Lord Copplestone made me take my old place by him.

'They meet at Harleigh Brake, Nelly,' he said. 'Skylark's in prime condition. What *would* Aunt Tabitha say? Shant I catch it when I come to you next week?' and the jolly old man rubbed his hands in mischievous delight, at the prospect of 'getting a rise,' as he called it, out of Aunt Tabitha.

Sundry gentlemen in red coats, from the neighbouring country-houses, dropped in ere breakfast was over, on their way to cover. The Miss Veres, and many of the ladies of the party, were going to see as much fun as possible from the carriages, Mrs. Singleton and myself being the only two who were going to ride.

'And so you are going to ride to the meet?' observed my little tormentor, who sat opposite to me. I looked steadily at her.

'Not only to the meet, I hope, Mrs. Singleton.'

Lord Copplestone smiled with a sly significance.

'Why, to be sure, if Nelly was only going to the meet, there would be no use in her riding Skylark.'

'Skylark!' echoed Mrs. Singleton.

'Do you mean to say, Miss Vavasour, that you are venturesome enough to ride that hunter? I hope you have insured your life.'

'No, I have not. I am not nervous—are you?'

Mrs. Singleton coloured angrily at the question.

'Certainly not. In my case it would be different; but I should think that it required an experienced hand for the attempt you are rash enough to undertake.'

Her manner was coolly irritating; but I thought it better to drop the subject. I could not conceal from myself that there was in reality a great amount of reason in what she

said; and I could only hope that the results would not corroborate her words.

By ten o'clock we were all ready to start. Mrs. Singleton was mounted when I came down to the entrance. I ran my eyes jealously over the brown mare she rode—perfect in all her proportions, but not more perfect than the firm seat and graceful figure of her mistress. Lord Edward Karr was lazily drawing on his gloves, whilst his groom was leading up and down a handsome bay horse with white stockings. Mr. Thornhill, I must allow, looked more at home on a well-bred grey mare than he did in a drawing-room. I looked anxiously for Skylark. There he was—I had no difficulty in recognising him. He was a very powerful thoroughbred chesnut. I don't pretend to being equal to the task of giving a faithful description of his rare proportions, showing no end of sinew, for the benefit of abler judges than myself. I might do Skylark a grievous injustice by attempting to pourtray all those qualities which combined to make him the magnificent-looking animal he was. His small ears pointing daggerwise, and his fidgetty movements under the groom's restraining hands gave strong signs of an impatience to be off. 'Goodness!' I thought, 'I only hope I may manage to keep on.' Sir Hugh Stracey was on a very fine dark chesnut; but when I came down the steps he dismounted, and gave his horse to a groom.

'Allow me to mount you, Miss Vavasour,' he said. 'He's a splendid-looking fellow you are going to ride.'

He did not make any doubting or uncomplimentary addition, after the fashion of Lord Edward Karr; but yet I saw a look of anxiety in his face.

'Have you bespoke a shutter, or something of the kind, to be conveyed home on, Miss Vavasour?' drawled Lord Edward.

'No, I have not; but if you think there is any chance of your requiring one yourself, I am sure that Lady Coppleston will see that one is sent.'

'There, Karr, that's one for you,

and you richly deserve it,' said Sir Hugh, laughing.

The flapping of my habit, as I sprung into the saddle, rather upset Skylark, who resented the affront by rearing up into the air. I patted him gently and coaxed him. The groom, who was an old acquaintance of mine, came round on the other side, and lowering his voice, said, 'Never mind, Miss, don't you be afeared on him, he'll carry you like a bird. He's got no vice, not him; only a little skittish. You give him his 'ead, and mind you,' he added emphatically, 'keep your hands low, and whatever 'ee do, don't go for to check 'im at his fences. Keep him well together and he'll take you over I'll warrant.'

I promised to obey these instructions, and we rode off. Harleigh Brake was about three miles from Burton. It was a favourite fixture of Mr. Treherne's, as it was sufficiently central to draw the best men of two other packs; and there is always a fox to be found in Harleigh Brake.

It was the first meet of the season, and a very full one. Many carriages, filled with bright, pretty faces, were drawn up on the grass by the covert side. Groups of men in red coats were scattered over the big pasture—some talking eagerly together, earnest in speculation concerning the coming run, whilst others were scanning either the merits of their own boots and tops or those of their neighbours. The sweet fresh smell of the grass, wet with morning dew; the gay scene, with its background of blue hills and moor; the happy faces around me, all wrought a beneficial influence upon me; and notwithstanding the restive signs of impatience evinced by Skylark, I gave myself up to the sensational enjoyment of the moment. To be perfectly frank, I should perhaps add that certain complimentary observations which caught my ear, tended to increase this satisfactory phase of feeling.

'I say, Jervoise, who's that girl on that splendid chesnut?' I overheard one man ask his neighbour. 'She has a superb seat and is stunningly good-looking into the bargain.'

'Don't know,' responded the wry-

looking individual he addressed; 'some one come with the Copplestone party.'

I also was fortunate enough to attract the notice of one of a group of runners.

'By Gosh, Bill! there's a spicy turn out! That ere one on the chesnut horse, my eyes! I wouldn't mind being spliced if I got her for my missus.'

Sir Hugh Stracey also overheard the remark, and laughed heartily.

'There, Miss Vavasour! now that is what I call a genuine compliment. Perhaps,' he added in a lower tone, 'he is not singular in his opinion.'

Of course, I knew that few men would neglect the opportunity of making pretty speeches of the kind, which of course mean nothing. It was ridiculous to blush, I know, but still I am afraid I was foolish enough to do so, and no doubt Sir Hugh was setting me down as a credulous goose, for when I looked up his eyes were fixed on my face.

Presently, cries of 'Here they come,' from various quarters, proclaimed the arrival of the hounds. They were a splendid-looking pack, I thought. How beautiful they looked, with the bloom on their various-coloured skins, and their quick earnest movements! The huntsman—a very determined, active-looking man—certainly cast suspicious glances at me as he passed close by. It was a natural antagonism, doubtless—unpleasant visions of heading the fox, getting in the way, or any of those feats for which women are famed in the hunting field, crossed his anxious mind. Almost immediately in the rear appeared the master himself. I cannot do justice to that prince of gentlemen sportsmen, Mr. Treherne, by attempting to describe him—his fine athletic figure, the good-natured, frank expression of his handsome face, his courteous manner, and last but not least, his perfect seat, all went to make him what he was—the *beau-ideal* of a master of fox-hounds. Lord Copplestone and my father arrived a few minutes later. 'How well the dear old governor looks,' I thought with a thrill of intense pride. He was riding his

favourite hunter, Touchstone. I quite agree with old Isaac, who once said, 'They make a splendid picture, them two—they do—the squire and Touchstone.' Presently, my father rode up to me with Mr. Treherne.

'This is the little Nelly you were asking after, Treherne. Three years make a difference, don't they?'

Mr. Treherne shook hands with me. 'Forgive me, Miss Vavasour,' he said, with his frank, pleasant smile. 'I have not forgotten my pleasant visit at Compton Lacy, but I confess I should hardly have recognised the young lady who did me the honour to conduct me under the miseltoe.' He referred to an event of some few years back, when at a juvenile ball, given in honour of my birthday, Mr. Treherne had been my partner in a country dance, and had duly paid the forfeit of passing under the miseltoe.

'Skylark ought to be proud of his burden, Miss Vavasour. I question if he has ever carried a lady before,' said Mr. Treherne. Which announcement did not reassure me at the moment. When he had moved off, my father said, in a slightly anxious tone, 'If you find that you cannot hold him, turn back, Nelly.'

'Yes, papa.'

'Now you know perfectly well that you don't mean to turn back,' said Sir Hugh Stracey, in a low tone. 'One word of advice—Mrs. Singleton is a safe lead. She knows this country. Follow her.'

'Thank you,' I answered; but inwardly I resolved that I would not follow her. In a few minutes the hounds were put into the gorse; many of the scarlet coats began to move out of the field into the lane; Mr. Thornhill, who seemed to be in his usual state of nervous excitement, rushed forward at this juncture to open a hand gate for my passage through. Unfortunately his attempts were abortive, and his failure called down some remarks—frank rather than complimentary—from the people behind, who were exasperated by the stoppage, each individual being anxious to get on, ready for a start.

'What a precious muff!' ejaculated one, with a groan.

'Got toes on his hands instead of

fingers,' grumbled, *sotto voce*, a burly young farmer.

'Why, bless my stars! if he aint pushing the latch down instead of up,' cried an irritable old party, in a green coat and worsted gloves.

'Let me do it, Mr. Thornhill; I think I can see how it is to be done,' I said, pitying the poor man's embarrassing position, and forcing Skylark closer to the gate. I succeeded in raising the latch with the gold crook of my riding whip.

'Thankee kindly, marm,' said the owner of the worsted gloves, as he jostled through.

'A set of surly brutes, those fellows!' remarked Mr. Thornhill, much relieved by this timely assistance; 'but all's fair in a hunting field, Miss Vavasour.'

My attention was now given to Skylark, who was eager to be off; tearing at the reins and showing strong symptoms of a vicious intention of kicking at every impediment in his way. Mrs. Singleton kept her eye fixed on my movements, letting fall now and then one or two remarks prophetic of coming evil, which happily had the effect of bracing instead of shaking my nerves. Very soon a loud, sonorous 'holloa' rang through the air. In another minute the hounds came pouring like a cataract, over a fence close before us. 'There he is! There he is!' shouted a hundred voices at once, alluding to the fox, which I could not see. The next moment we were off. The hounds were streaming through a wide meadow, running in full cry; and now came the tug of war. Sir Hugh Stracey was riding in front of me. Mrs. Singleton and Lord Edward Karr were on a line with me. We took the first two fences almost side by side. Mrs. Singleton rode splendidly, never swerving in her saddle; and I felt that in the bay mare, notwithstanding her inferior size, Skylark had no mean rival. Before we had reached the end of the third enclosure matters took a different complexion. There were some weak places in the line of stiff hedges. Mrs. Singleton, with a practised eye, made for the nearest, but they were all out of the

straight line. No one seemed mad enough to face the wall of black, heavy, thickset thorn right ahead of us. With a tremendously wide ditch on this side, and goodness knows what uncertainty on the other, my heart recoiled at the bare idea, and I pulled Skylark violently to the left, intending to follow in the wake of the others; but I might as well have attempted to turn a stone wall. 'Might is right,' Skylark's blood was up, and he was going straight at that awful place, disdaining to swerve a yard out of his line. For one moment my heart stood still; every stride brought us nearer, and the chances were a thousand to one against me. Shouts from behind fell on my ear, and some one cried out (I think the voice was Sir Hugh Stracey's) 'For God's sake don't try that, Miss Vavasour!' They thought of course I was doing it from inclination; and at one moment I longed to scream wildly for help. Thank goodness, I didn't disgrace myself by this futile exposition of my thorough helplessness. I could only hope that my probable fall would not kill me. I could see the wide ditch on this side, and I could imagine the fearful drop on the other, supposing that I cleared the tremendous hedge. My wits were perhaps sharpened by the urgency of the moment. My greatest chance now lay in sending Skylark at it as fast as he could go. Catching fast hold of his head, I administered a sharp tap with my whip, though, indeed, there was but little need to quicken his pace as he neared the difficulty. With a tremendous rush he charged the place. I closed my eyes. A fearful sound—crash—another still greater plunge downwards. It was nearly all up with me; and I am not quite sure that I did not clutch at the pommel; I hope not; but I did not fall; and I had scarcely time to know where I was before that glorious Skylark had settled into his stride, and I had recovered my balance. Another shout from behind, this time of applause. 'Splendidly done!' cried a voice. I looked behind—two horsemen were following me—Sir Hugh Stracey and Lord

Edward Karr. The huntsman was alongside of me. 'Only don'tee head the hounds, that's a dear,' he said, as we rode side by side. There was no rancour in his voice, and he actually smiled benignly on me. I did not see Mrs. Singleton: she must have lost ground at the last fence—which I afterwards heard the bay mare had shamefully refused. The next fence was close to us, when Lord Edward Karr passed me like a flash of lightning. I saw his horse rise. Then I heard a crash. Before I could collect my thoughts, Skylark had cleared the fence, and I had ridden over Lord Edward Karr and his horse, who were rolling in the deep ditch. A scream of horror burst from me. Had I touched him? But to my intense relief I saw him scrambling up. At any rate I had not injured him seriously. By this time I was close to the hounds, who were sailing over the wide pastures. Skylark was enjoying the lead all to himself. My courage rose with the excitement of the pace, and with a sense of the dangers I had as yet escaped. For the space of three more enclosures I rode alone, taking the fences as they came in my way, with first-class riders behind me, and sufficiently close to testify afterwards that I never once shirked. The fact (unknown to them, happily) was, that I had no choice but to go as straight as a line. What they took for daring was an act of simple necessity, from which there was no escape on my part. In the first place, I had not sufficient knowledge to enable me to 'ride to points,' as that more skilful and first-rate performer, Mrs. Singleton, could do; and, secondly, had I, indeed, been gifted with that necessary lore, the possession of it would have been unavailable in the present case, as I had not the strength or power to control Skylark's movements, who had chosen to go his own way, setting at nought my only feeble effort to turn him from his course. At the last fence I had a near chance of a fall—a stiff bullfinch. Crack again went Skylark, breaking through it from sheer velocity, but striking his knees

against a strong wooden rail beyond. He managed to get over that somehow; and just as I had given myself up for lost, he recovered himself by another plunge, and we were flying away again all right. 'Well done, Nelly!' cried my father's voice close to me. I own to a sensation of relief as the open moor came in view before us. My worst difficulties were over. In another fifteen minutes I had the honour and glory of being one of the successful few up at the finish, in time to see the poor fox quite dead, held high above the huntsman's head, with the hounds hanging round him, in expectation of their reward, after a run of an hour and ten minutes, not to be surpassed, for pace and straightness, over a distance of ten miles. It was an hour of triumph worth all the risks I had encountered. After the first excitement of the breaking up of the fox had subsided, the general attention turned on me, and I found myself the heroine of the moment. Mr. Treherne came up to me with the brush in his hand—his handsome old face sparkling with excitement and pleasure.

'Miss Vavasour,' he said, 'will you keep this brush in memorial of a day in your life which you must be proud of? In all my experience I have never before seen a lady ride as you have ridden to-day. In fact, I don't know many men who would have faced so unhesitatingly the fences you dared so gallantly. I can only hope that it will not be the last time you will honour our field by your presence.'

Of course I felt intensely pleased; and not less so by the speech of the old huntsman, who looked at me in silent approbation for a few minutes, and then said—

'Well, I'm blest if ever I see a laddy ride like that un before.'

Sir Hugh Stracey came up and said, 'Miss Vavasour, you must forgive me for my presumption in advising you to follow any one's lead. How little did I know that you were going to lead us all.'

If Skylark could have spoken, perhaps he would have said, 'Don't waste those praises on the incapable

creature on my back, but give] honour where honour is due.' He could not speak, however; and had he been able to have done so, perhaps he would have been too generous an ally to have betrayed me. To my surprise Mr. Thornhill was up at the last. How he got there I could not tell, for I had not seen him in the run; but Sir Hugh Stracey explained the matter.

'Thornhill is a thorough sportsman; he knows the country well, and he rides to points. He knows that his grey has no love for the large fences, so he wisely takes care to spare him. I can't understand myself how he came up to-day, however, for the racing pace at which the hounds kept on, and the straight running of the fox, would have beaten off any but those who got a good start at first, and could stick to them through thick and thin, as you did, Miss Vavasour.'

Mr. Thornhill was enthusiastic in his compliments.

'You've done the little widow, at any rate, Miss Vavasour,' he said; 'and my opinion is she won't like you any the better for it. I found her in difficulties at a brook, and when I offered to help her she snubbed me on the spot; so I left my lady, and I believe she's gone home in a towering passion. She can't stand being distanced in anything, I can tell you.'

'You mustn't tell tales out of school, Thornhill,' observed Sir Hugh Stracey, with a laugh.

On our way home we met Lord Edward Karr with Lord Copplestone. The latter had come to grief, as his horse had cast a shoe in the run. But he was always jolly and good-tempered under every circumstance, and his delight in my prowess far exceeded any discomfiture on his own account.

'Nelly, my dear, I'm proud of you! Why, I don't believe Jack would have taken that nasty place. I've a good mind to make you a present of Skylark, only Aunt Tabitha would scratch my eyes out and say I was snaring you to destruction.'

Lord Edward's bridle hand and the head of his horse were plastered over with mud, the result of that

unlucky fall which had lost him the lead and the run. In justice to his lordship I must own that his stolid equanimity was in no wise disturbed.

'You have gone splendidly, Miss Vavasour,' he said, languidly. 'I withdraw all my insinuations which were unfortunate enough to offend you yesterday.'

'I think you may,' I returned, laughing, 'especially when you ran a near chance of requiring that shutter you so kindly offered me this morning.'

'Oh, ah! very good. You nearly broke my head in a savage manner. That comes of riding jealously against a man, as you did.'

'She didn't ride against you, she rode over you,' observed Mr. Thornhill, with a laugh at his own wit.

Lord Edward looked at him in supreme disdain.

'He came an awful cropper at that place, now didn't he?' observed Mr. Thornhill in an undertone to me.

We had a very long ride of some fifteen miles home. Two or three of the horses were rather beat, but Skylark was game to the last, and appeared, indeed, rather unwilling to suit his pace to the quiet jog-trot of his companions.

'You must be rather tired, Miss Vavasour,' said Sir Hugh Stracey, as he assisted me to dismount. 'With the fatigues of a ball before you, I should strongly recommend a cup of tea, a novel, and a long rest.'

'The first and last part of your advice I shall certainly adopt, but I don't care about the novel, to-day, at least.'

'Ah! it is well you put in that amendment. Never tell me you don't care about novels; I should give you up as worse than *Die Vernon*.'

'Perhaps he also thinks me masculine because I am fond of hunting,' was the thought that flashed across me. I could not refrain from satisfying my curiosity on this point, although I hated myself the next moment for asking the question.

'You think I ought not to ride—to hunt, I mean?'

'No, indeed, I think nothing of the kind,' he answered, more eagerly

than the occasion warranted, I thought. 'As a rule, perhaps, a hunting-field is not the place for women. The risks are too great, and I confess I am not an admirer of the disciples of *Die Vernon* in general. But there are some people who have the happy power of doing everything well; and what you would object to in another person you only admire in them.'

I met Lady Copplestone in the hall, as I passed through it on my way up-stairs.

'You naughty child!' she exclaimed; 'I have passed such a morning on your account. How wrong of Lord Copplestone to put you on that nasty horse.'

'Oh, Lady Copplestone! don't, please, say a word against Skylark. You cannot think how beautifully he carried me.'

'Yes, I dare say; and pray what would Lord Copplestone have said for himself if you had broken your neck?'

'That better people had met with the same fate, dear Lady Copplestone,' I answered, laughing.

'You are a very naughty child,' she repeated; 'and now I must insist on your not coming down before dinner, or I shall not let you go to the ball to-night.'

Lady Copplestone followed me to my room, where Margaret was awaiting me with a tempting little tea-service laid out, and anxiety depicted on her honest little face.

'Oh, miss!' she exclaimed, as soon as she saw me, 'thank the Lord you've come back safe and sound! That old fool of a Isaac! If I don't pay him out for this— Oh! my lady, I beg pardon, I didn't see your ladyship; but I've been in such a fright, thinking that perhaps Miss Vavasour might be brought home dead, my lady, all along of that big brute of a horse I saw her ride away on this morning.'

'You are quite right, Margaret,' observed Lady Copplestone; 'but I don't think Isaac was the most to blame in the matter. Now I leave Miss Vavasour under your charge. Nelly, darling, we don't dine before eight o'clock to-night; so you will

oblige me by taking a long rest before dressing.'

Dear, kind Lady Copplestone, this was all the scolding I received from her. Aunt Tabitha would not let me off so easily when the news reached her ears.

If men enjoy their cigar as much as we women do that unrivalled cup of tea at five o'clock P.M., all I can say is, that it would be a shame to grudge them the indulgence of that luxury.

In a very cosy arm-chair drawn close to a brightly-blazing fire, with my feet on the fender, and lastly, but not least, attired in a very becoming peignoir, trimmed with rose colour, I drank my hot tea, and thought what a pleasant world I lived in. Gradually my reflections became more vague and undefined, and I dropped into a comfortable slumber, which lasted until Margaret reappeared with the announcement that it was time to dress.

'It's almost a pity you've got to put on your ball-dress before dinner,' she remarked, anxiously. 'I do hope you won't tumble it, miss.'

'Oh Margaret, it is a great blessing on the contrary; having to dress twice would be a bore to-night.'

'Well, miss, you don't look tired, that's one comfort,' said Margaret when I was dressed, standing at a little distance for the purpose of surveying to greater advantage the clouds of white tulle, forming my pretty ball-dress. 'And, to be sure, those white azaleas do look beautiful in your hair, miss, and on your dress; they're as natural as life! What a lucky thing it is that Mrs. Tabitha should have given you that lovely pearl necklace with the diamond clasp! When the old lady is in the mind to do something, she does it handsomely—that's a certain thing. The pearls suit your complexion, miss.'

'Don't make me vain, Margaret,' I said, laughing; but secretly I indulged in a hope that some one else would think my dress becoming.

In the drawing-room I was received with honours. The Veres, who were good-natured girls, told me that every one had been talking of my riding.

'Your friend Mr. Thornhill is almost beside himself with admiration,' said Grace, the youngest.

'Sir Hugh Stracey says you are the most graceful rider he has ever seen,' remarked Laura Vere. What a nice kind girl she is, I thought.

'I had no idea you were so Amazonian in your tastes, Miss Vavasour,' observed Mrs. Singleton, with a tone of ill-concealed spite in her voice. Notwithstanding which, I could not but admire her as she stood there leaning with her round white shoulders against the marble pillar of the mantelpiece in a careless, graceful attitude. The coronet of dark green ivy-leaves, glittering with diamond stars, in her golden hair, made her look like some exquisite fairy queen. Surely lovely women need not be spiteful, although the failing may be less unpardonable in those excluded from the sisterhood of beauty.

'Certainly you were fortunate in your horse,' continued Mrs. Singleton. 'You were better mounted than I was; I shall sell my mare.'

'Then you will be very ungrateful,' said Sir Hugh Stracey, who was standing near us, 'for she's the cleverest little animal of her size I know anywhere.'

'And Miss Vavasour did not owe her success entirely to her horse,' remarked Miss Vere, looking at Mrs. Singleton. 'Lord Copplestone says she rides splendidly, and I have heard many people say so to-day.'

'Oh, of course,' replied Mrs. Singleton, with her scornful little laugh; 'good implements make good workmen.'

'Not always,' retorted Miss Vere; 'it requires good workmen to make use of the good implements.'

Mrs. Singleton maintained an angry silence. I believe in her heart she was afraid of that plain-speaking Miss Vere. Sir Hugh Stracey smiled mischievously. He took me in to dinner. And although I felt convinced, from the curl of Mrs. Singleton's lip, and from her frequent glances directed at me, that she was talking of me to Lord Edward Karr in terms more critical than good-natured, yet the fact did not tend to disconcert me much.

Had Lord Edward Karr repeated his question of the preceding evening, I should have answered that sometimes dinner parties were the pleasantest things in the world. At ten o'clock there was an immense amount of cloaking and shawling in the hall, preparatory to the departure for the ball.

'Who goes in the omnibus?' inquired Lord Copplestone. Of course there were endless candidates for this popular and sociable mode of conveyance. 'Are you for the omnibus, Nelly?'

'No,' interfered Lady Copplestone, decidedly; 'Nelly goes with me in the carriage.'

I think I felt a little disappointed at the moment, for Jack always says that an omnibus is the jolliest way of going to a ball; but I recovered very quickly; for as the omnibus was driving off, quite full, I saw Sir Hugh Stracey standing on the steps.

'Don't you patronise the omnibus then, Stracey?' asked Lord Copplestone.

'No thank you; I am going to take care of Lady Copplestone, if she will allow me.'

'All right then. Vavasour, you and I will go afterwards in the brougham.'

I wonder if I shall ever enjoy a ball again as much as I did that one!

All country balls are of course conducted very much on the same principle. It has, I believe, been very commonly observed, that the musicians are of a different species from their brethren in the metropolis. They go to sleep more readily, and possess the valuable faculty of playing equally correctly in a state of slumber. Fat, benevolent-looking old gentlemen in white waistcoats take up their station by the fireplace, and have a great deal of enjoyment in their quiet, undemonstrative way, especially when the moment arrives for them to toddle in to supper, with a comfortable dowager under their protection. Don't they eat, that's all! as Bob would say, and who would grudge them this innocent enjoyment? The young ladies flutter into the ball-room under the wings of their

ample mammae, all more or less in a state of nervous apprehension lest they should not be asked to dance. Pretty, round, rosy faces greet you at every turn, and the amount of floral ornaments on the tops of their devoted little heads, in the shape of gigantic wreaths, would fill a gardener with envy; whilst the London girls who may happen to be there, stand erect and self-possessed, with irreproachable toilettes, and faultless gloves. Amongst the male portion of the society a distinction is likewise observed. The local dandies congregate about the doorway, holding tenaciously to their hats, and glaring defiantly at their future partners over the well-starched barriers of their stiff collars. But the unconcerned London man walks coolly over the course, taking his choice of the freshest and fairest of the country damsels. All the grandees, of course, take up their position at the top of the room. Now and then an aspiring young man, one of the rank and fashion of the little country town, disregarding the cordon of separation, dashes across the room into the charmed circle, and tempts his fate by asking one of its members to dance, which daring proposal is met probably by either a civil rejection, or a frightful snub, as the case may be. I must observe that Bob's alarming prophecy fell short of fulfilment. I had plenty of partners. Lord Edward Karr did me the honour to ask me for a waltz, but I had happened to overhear part of a conversation between him and Mrs. Singleton on the subject a few minutes previously. Mrs. Singleton said something to him which I did not hear; but Lord Edward's slow measured accents were quite audible to me.

'No; I never could commit myself in that way. I have not seen Miss Vavasour waltz yet.'

When he did ask me, I replied—

'Thank you, Lord Edward, but I agree with you. It is dangerous to commit oneself before one has had an opportunity of judging how a person dances. I have not seen you waltz yet.'

Lord Edward actually changed colour.

'There must be some mistake—' he began with a decided confusion of manner.

'No, indeed,' I answered, laughing, 'no mistake at all. I overheard what you said to Mrs. Singleton, and I think you are quite right.'

'Do you mean to say that you will not dance with me, Miss Vavasour?'

'Most distinctly so at present: under any circumstances I should have been obliged to decline the honour, as my engagements are full.'

He attempted an apology, but I laughed the matter off; and very late in the evening, after he had asked me three times, I danced with him. I think he will allow in future that 'Greek met Greek' that evening.

'Look at Thornhill, Miss Vavasour,' said Sir Hugh Stracey, in the pauses of a galop. 'It needs no prophet to tell us that *that* pace is too good to last. He will be down in a minute for a thousand—ah! I thought so. "The brave may fall but cannot yield."'

As he spoke, Mr. Thornhill, who had been plunging down the room regardless of time and tune and opposing obstacles, finally bumped against a stout young lady in yellow, and came down with a fearful crash, falling over his wretched partner, whom he would not release. Not long after the catastrophe he came up to us in the tea-room.

'Did you see that purl I had?' he asked, with the air of a man who had done something worthy of notice.

'I should rather think we did see it,' said Sir Hugh Stracey, laughing. 'How did you manage it? and what has become of your unfortunate partner? I hope she was not much hurt?'

'No, I don't think she was; at any rate she said she wasn't; but you see we were going the dounce of a pace backwards down the room, and somehow I caught my foot in somebody's crinoline, and it was all up with us. But I never let go,' he added, excitedly. 'Did you remark that I never let go?'

'No, indeed, you didn't,' said Sir Hugh Stracey, laughing heartily. 'It would have been better for your partner if you had let go.'

'Well, just look with what a grip she laid hold of me,' said Mr. Thornhill, looking disconsolately at his elaborate shirt-front, which certainly bore traces of the despairing clench of the young lady's fingers. 'What on earth did she do that for?'

'In self-defence to be sure,' said Sir Hugh Stracey. 'Now my dear fellow I should advise you in future to keep to the rotatory movement. It doesn't answer to send your partner down the room backwards at the killing pace you were going.'

'But I am particularly fond of going backwards. I must say she was a plucky little creature, and I'll ask her to dance again.'

'Won't that be a questionable consolation under the circumstances?' suggested Sir Hugh Stracey.

'I like going round the wrong way, too,' said Mr. Thornhill. 'Miss Vavasour, will you dance the next waltz with me, and we will try that?'

I declined the proposal, however, and compromised the matter by dancing the Lancers instead with him: the intricacies of which so puzzled him, that the poor man was in a white heat before the conclusion.

'I'd rather go into training for a race any day than do this sort of thing often,' he observed, as he sat down in a state of great exhaustion. 'You don't seem to mind it at all, Miss Vavasour.'

'No,' I replied, laughing, 'dancing does not tire me.'

'I heard some people say just now that you were the belle of the ball, Miss Vavasour; and I am sure I agree with them,' presently observed my plain-spoken admirer.

'I am very much obliged to you and to them for your too flattering opinion. I think that Mrs. Singleton is decidedly the prettiest person in the room to-night—she is lovely.'

'Well, that's what I call generous!' exclaimed Mr. Thornhill. 'Why, she hates you, Miss Vavasour. I told you she would.'

'Does she? Why should she hate me, Mr. Thornhill?'

'Jealousy, nothing but jealousy, I tell you. There's nothing so bitter as a jealous woman—Kilkenny cats are a joke to them. Why, do you know, Miss Vavasour, there were two girls in Hampshire last year—and very good-looking ones I can tell you—who both took a fancy to me. Some people said it was to my money; but then the world's always ill-natured, you know. Well! if those two didn't lead me the life of a galley slave: dinner invitations without end; and when I spoke to one, the other actually abused me to my face.'

'And which of them is to be the happy winner of the prize?' I asked, much amused.

'Oh, neither of them! take my word for it. No,' he added, trying to look sentimental, 'the prize is reserved for somebody worthier of it. No, I don't mean that, Miss Vavasour. I wish to win a prize worth a hundred of them; that's what I wanted to say.'

It was fortunate that Lady Coplestone asked me at this juncture if I was ready to go; or I might have offended my eccentric friend by a peal of laughter. We had to wait some little time in the cloak-room for the carriage.

'Which have you enjoyed the most, Miss Vavasour, the run or the ball?' asked Sir Hugh Stracey.

'I have enjoyed the ball very much,' I replied.

'That is an evasion,' he said. 'A first-rate rider as you are, should have answered at once—the run.'

'But I am not a first-rate rider.'

'How can you presume to tell me that after this morning's experience?'

There was an unaccountable feeling in my mind which led me to tell him exactly how matters had really stood with regard to Skylark and myself. Sir Hugh was one of those essentially honest people who are so true in themselves that one feels a reluctance to deceive them on the slightest point. So I told him the whole truth, not omitting my annoyance at Mrs. Singleton's and Lord Edward Karr's remarks; wish-

ing, by the way, that he would not look at me so pertinaciously.

'But I saw you put your horse at that fence, Miss Vavasour,' he said, when I had finished.

'Yes, because I thought my only chance of safety was to make the best of my hopeless position. You see I am not a heroine after all.'

He looked at me again, and said quietly—

'I don't know what you call a heroine. I think you something more than a heroine.'

Again I was absurd enough to blush.

'Why did you tell me this? Would you have told any one else?' he asked presently.

'No,' I answered, hesitatingly. It was an awkward question—why, indeed, had I told him?

'Why did you tell me then?' he repeated.

'Goodness!' I thought, 'I wish the carriage would come.' Sir Hugh persisted in the inquiry.

'I don't know I am sure,' I said, 'perhaps because I trust you; or, perhaps,' I added, growing desperate at having made my position more uncomfortable by this admission, 'because I—'

'No,' he interrupted, 'don't, please, withdraw that reason. Let me think it was because you trusted me.'

Fortunately the announcement of the carriage put an end to my perplexity, and we did not revert to the subject. As I put out my candle that night, or rather that morning, I felt a regret that one of the pleasantest days in my life had come to a close.

In the morning Margaret informed me that my health had been drunk in the servants' hall with great applause—Lord Copplestone's groom having proposed it. Since then, Brookes, the old huntsman, has asked for my photograph, which I have given him; and which, Mr. Treherne informs me, the worthy old fellow has placed between the leaves of his hymn book, declaring that I was the only lady he ever cared to see out with their pack. Margaret also in-

formed me that Isaac had been in a state of great delight.

'An old donkey,' she added contemptuously. 'It isn't *his* fault, miss, that you're alive to-day. I took care to let him know that of all the idiots I have ever seen, *he's* about the choicest! Won't he catch it from Mrs. Tabitha if she hears of it!'

Lady Copplestone used her best endeavours to keep me for a few days longer; but my father resisted her entreaties, declaring that he was under a promise to my mother of bringing me back with him.

'We shall meet again next week, Miss Vavasour,' said Sir Hugh Stracey, as he handed me to the carriage. 'Your father has kindly asked me to meet Jack, who is coming to you, I hear.'

'He will be delighted to see you again, Sir Hugh. It will be pleasant for you both to talk over old times!'

'Very pleasant, indeed. But I look forward to something pleasanter still, Miss Vavasour. I hope I have other friends besides dear old Jack at Compton Lacy.'

'Aunt Tabitha?' I inquired, with a smile.

'No, not Aunt Tabitha,' he said laughing, 'happy as I shall of course be to make her acquaintance.'

'We shall be glad to see you, Sir Hugh.'

'Will you really?' he asked, holding my hand certainly some seconds longer than he need have done. I made no answer; but as we drove away, I thought by the expression of his face, that he was satisfied without one. I have never hunted since that memorable day. The winter is over, and I take pleasant rides in long spring afternoons through the woods white with wild anemones. My companion is Sir Hugh Stracey, to whom I am to be married in June. This arrangement seems to give perfect satisfaction to all my family, including Aunt Tabitha, who says she hopes that I shall be worthy of him—which, by the way, is not a very complimentary remark. She also says that now I am going to be married, she trusts I shall turn over a new leaf.

